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A 'Post-Historical' Cinema of Suspense: Jean-Luc Nancy and the Limits of Redemption

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A 'Post-Historical' Cinema of Suspense
Jean-Luc Nancy and the Limits of Redemption

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Bath
Department of European Studies and Modern Languages
November 2010

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ABSTRACT

This thesis theorises an approach to cinematic suspense derived from a set of films that challenge the teleological and redemptive principles of traditional narrative. It is argued that such a challenge is drawn from the need to account for conditions of violence and suffering without recourse to the traditional grounds of redemption. They set out to question the symbols that underpin a faith in its possibilities. Such films counter these grounds with a form of perpetuated suspense that continually withholds resolution, stressing and destabilising both the terms of redemption and the affect of its aesthetic representations.

Significantly, this thesis examines films from the years following 1989 that confront this central theme within conditions of historical hiatus and the disintegration of ideological certainties occurring in the wake of European communism. These films, by Kira Muratova, Béla Tarr, Artur Aristakisyan, Alexander Sokurov, Bruno Dumont, Roy Andersson, Ulrich Seidl and Gus Van Sant, present a world in which human beings are always already turned against themselves, placing them in the context of contemporary philosophical aporias that identify the human condition as enigmatic and resisting of itself. They suspend the symbolic structures associated with redemption in order to reconfigure contemporary film as a ‘realist’ cinema at the threshold of the interpretative and reconciliatory economies implicit in the soteriological mythology of Western thought.

Tracing Paul Ricoeur’s schematic account of the symbols and myths of a ‘fallen’ world, the thesis turns on Jean-Luc Nancy’s subsequent critique of the insufficiency of myths to properly account for existence. In place of an hermeneutic recovery of the real and its meaning, Nancy’s ‘realist’ philosophy of ‘sense’ and its application to the cinema offer an account that speaks less of conflicting narratives of redemption than a radical stripping away of its terms, suggesting that it is redemption from the normative terms of redemption that ultimately constitutes the proper question at the heart of these films.

CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Contents	2
Acknowledgements	3
Preface: The <i>Elephant</i> in the Room	4
Introduction: Cinema and the Search for Salvation	8
Part One: History, Context, Style	
Chapter 1: Films of Fallibility: the ‘Symbols of Evil’ and the Interruption of ‘Sin’	31
Chapter 2: The ‘Post-Historical’ Context: Redemption’s Hiatus	47
Chapter 3: Redemption as an Aesthetic or Conceptual Practice	73
Chapter 4: Cinematic Realism and the Mystery of Redemption	97
(i) Wim Wenders, André Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer: the lost real	98
(ii) Werner Herzog, Paul Schrader, Gilles Deleuze: the mysterious real	108
(iii) Jean-Luc Nancy: the exposed real	117
Part Two: Films	
Chapter 5: A-religious Confession: <i>Elephant</i>	124
Chapter 6: Defilement: <i>Flanders</i>	143
Chapter 7: Defilement: <i>The Asthenic Syndrome; Palms; Russian Ark</i>	162
Chapter 8: Sin: <i>Sátántangó; Songs from the Second Floor</i>	179
Chapter 9: Sin: <i>Werckmeister Harmonies</i>	193
Chapter 10: Guilt: <i>Dog Days; You the Living; Import Export</i>	205
Conclusion: Interrupted Myths and Necessary Negativity	218
Bibliography	226
Filmography	234

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PREFACE

The *Elephant* in the Room

This thesis originates in two encounters. One of these was my first viewing of Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003), a film that I find, having now seen it many times, still retains the ability to unnerve, to disturb and, more particularly, to move and to touch with a sense of disquiet that is hard to qualify. The other was an earlier occasion in which I was involved, as an aspiring screenwriter, in the development process of a script. The industry-appointed script editors and development executives, always decent and encouraging, nevertheless could not accept the terms of the story's outcome, a story drawn from personal experience and one that involved considerable violence. After much consternation and a general sense of impasse, I was told with resignation, that, 'it may be real life but it's not drama'. What was missing, I was informed, was a sense of hope, of redemption or the lesson to be learned.

Cinema and violence is an emotionally charged couplet that underwrites the entire history of the medium. It is a combination that can both denigrate the medium, when necessary, and elevate it. The cinema is often accused of relishing the spectacle of violence, leading to its alleged effects on impressionable audiences. At other times, through the ability of film technique to do violence to perceptual experience, it has been charged with a revolutionary impetus, to shatter the complacent world and reconfigure it. At stake, in each version of cinema's 'truth' – if we can call it that – is redemption: in the first, of the values of its narrative, mythic and symbolic traditions; in the second, as the potential of its aesthetic, formal, and conceptual possibilities.

Then there is *Elephant*. The film reruns a recognisable incident from actuality without making any claims to be that incident. It avoids all narrative and symbolic qualifications for the event or any terms of understanding it. It overwhelms with the imminence of violence and death but withdraws from the spectacle of it, its mourning, or the provision of any psychological insight into victims or protagonists. It replays time without revealing any mystery and it introduces sounds that have no 'naturalistically' or 'psychologically' motivated right to be there. In short, when trying to 'read' *Elephant* according to traditional modes of interpretation it appears to

continually escape. Its elements seem to be those that are left remaining after so many attempts to interpret it have been found wanting.

What is more, this elusive aspect to *Elephant* chimed with several other films I had seen around the same time – films such as Ulrich Seidl's *Dog Days* (2002), Roy Andersson's *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000) and Béla Tarr's *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000) – each of which, despite their markedly different styles, forms and subject matter, generated the same sentiments in response: a need to account for the overwhelming sense of unease left by their seemingly unconditioned expressions of violence, disintegration and suffering.

When I initially embarked on this thesis as a means to explore this unease more thoroughly it was in traditional terms. I sought out paradigms and archetypes, genres and signifying terms of meaning behind the film's images of destruction. In particular, it was with regard to the variable uses of the term 'apocalypse' – a word that dogged these films in many critical analyses, purely on the grounds of their destructive or catastrophic content. Yet such an archetypal formula never felt fully applicable or appropriate: something in the films was always lacking, incomplete, or else escaped the neat confines of such term or exhausted it. Nevertheless, a detour through apocalypses led me to Kira Muratova's film, *The Asthenic Syndrome* (1990), and the Russian critic Boris Vladimirsky's response to it – the conundrum that finally motivates what follows.

This thesis, then, is my belated attempt to put forward a response to the challenge laid down by the script editors, although I am fully aware of the Quixotic irrelevance of this, since theirs is a world of production and funding in which the archetype rules for reasons of commercial necessity and the systematic calculation of box office receipts. But in film theory, at least, I can retain the privilege of avoiding the question of how films get made, and consider the effects of a few that did, somehow or other, and continue to believe that cinema is not determined solely by the structural rules of 'story models' and still open to the vagaries of 'real life'.

As I followed this thread further, the question of the 'real' – in relation to the image and what it means for the cinema – grew increasingly prominent. Moreover, it was invariably bound up with the notion of redemption, of redeeming some aspect of the world, whether in the perspectives of thinkers such as Walter Benjamin or André Bazin, or practitioners, especially those of post-war modernism, such as Wim Wenders and Jean-Luc Godard. As cinematic practice continues to integrate an ever-greater amount of computer-generated imagery and enhancement

into its fabric, the question of the nature of its 'real' is likely to re-emerge as a locus and means of opposition, even transgression, particularly in respect of those areas of financial impoverishment and budgetary restraint. The 'real' may be what redeems the 'have-nots' from the 'haves' in the sense that a necessary reliance on a direct contact with the profilmic world rather than the constructing of representational images becomes paramount. This, however, is the subject of a different thesis only alluded to here.

In this respect I found it necessary to pay attention to the lengthy history of this relation between the 'real' and its redemptive impetus in film-theoretical history as a means to sift those aspects that continued to apply to the recent films I was interested in from those aspects that seemed to defy established interpretations. In terms of a methodology, this is what led to the division of the thesis into two basic parts: the first outlining themes from that history, and importantly, parallel developments in cultural theory in much the same period; the second applying what can be drawn from it to specific films.

In the course of working through this film-theoretical history I became aware of the nuanced view of cinema and the real that has been put forward by the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. It would be remiss to suggest that it was this that provided me with 'answers', but what appeared to me to be his likely approach to the question had a profound impact on how I came to reflect on the films. To get to that point, however, required a certain attempt to come to terms with the wider philosophical context that is important to Nancy's terminology. Any shortcomings in this area are, of course, entirely mine.

I am also conscious of the recurrent problem by which film-theory so often seeks to apply or to prove philosophical or theoretical concepts in the light of particular films. It remains my belief that it is the films themselves that, to some extent, 'philosophise'. If I have ultimately and unwittingly ended up with an over-application of 'theory', it came about as a result of a belief that my chosen films – an initial problem was finding a collective term to encompass their various generic, stylistic, formal or national distinctions – were engaged in addressing the same kind of problems that were occupying thinkers in broader theoretical discourses.

The question of the act of cinema, its practice and technique, being one of 'contact' with a world at large seems to me to be a crucial one. Having had occasion to make a few films – as a writer, director and producer of both fiction and documentary, none of them of significance – what I retain from that experience is a sense that one is never fully in control. It might be argued

that I simply wasn't very good at it. There is a consistent line in film-theoretical discourse that attributes to films and their makers an absolute awareness of everything they do and that each and every image is a meticulously formulated ideological or sensory confidence trick intended to manipulate passive audiences into predetermined responses. The role of the critic is to reveal this artistry through the interpretation of its signs. Whilst this may be true in many cases, I'm inclined to believe that there is also a form of film practice that happens as a result of a simple enquiry, and, perhaps, incomprehension about the world. Thereafter, film-makers – the good ones – manage to gather some evidence of experiences, situations and conditions in the world that escape such signs. They assemble what remains of these signs and that which escapes signification and, very often, leave it at that. Some people may see that as a failure, particularly when the evidence on show is violent or destructive. It may be that we intrinsically crave a redemptive narrative in response to what's on show and it is the duty of film, or art, to tell us what form that redemption takes. Then again, to be left craving it may be the more profound, and more obviously necessary, affect a film can deliver.

INTRODUCTION

Cinema and the Search for Salvation

What stays with us is the image of an author who doesn't believe in the possibility of salvation and at the same time feverishly seeks it.

Boris Vladimirsky (in Taubman 2005: 61)

It is the above statement by the Russian critic Boris Vladimirsky that provides this thesis with its central theme. We are confronted with a cinema that invites recognition of the symbols of human fallibility, frailty and immorality but is devoid of the terms of redemptive teleology traditionally applied. At the same time these films advance the dissolution of those symbols albeit without descent into absolute meaninglessness. The question becomes: how might we account for the possibility of redemption which the films seem to demand and their evocation of a redemptive aspect in response to the violence, disintegration and suffering depicted?

This question is provoked by a series of films, beginning with Kira Muratova's *The Asthenic Syndrome* (1990), to which Vladimirsky was referring, that, despite differences in form, style and country of origin, are conceptually linked by this central question. Each of them develops from the locus of violent rupture or pervasive disintegration that is essentially ineffable. They refuse to rely or fall back on any traditional narrative or epistemological terms of interpretation, reconciliation or judgement for the acts or conditions they depict. Instead, they demand a heightened attention to the contradictory, antagonistic and violent aspects of human nature without qualification. Yet, through this determined and resolute insistence on the simple act of showing such images, they call upon a register of salvation or redemption above and beyond generic platitudes or narrative, dogmatic or psychological presuppositions.

In response, it would be reasonable to ask why a religious terminology of salvation or redemption is evoked, one that would seemingly be dependent on a relation to a divine, transcendent or non-human act of 'grace' as distinct from any other terms of social, political, psychological or categorically *humanist* improvement? It is precisely within a space opened up between the transcendent and the immanent that the power of their affect might be said to lie, one

that in philosophical terms reflects an enigmatically ‘spiritual’ and ‘aesthetic’ mode of address that is in tension with a modern incredulity towards the theological or mystical.

The films in question are replete with suggestive symbols and connotations linked to the religious or the destinal and calls upon the normative terms of redemption as the site rather than the solution for the situations they describe. In films as diverse as *Palms* (1993), *Sátántangó* (1994), *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000), *Dog Days* (2002) and *Elephant* (2003), the central tenet of human fallibility (whether through developed conditions of systemic antagonism or the rupturing acts of incomprehensible violence) is played out through the constant presentation and withdrawal of the symbols of what might be called, depending on one’s particular perspective, either the propensity to ‘sin’ or the ‘radical evil’ at the base of the human condition, that is, most broadly, an inscrutability at the heart of immoral, contradictory or destructive acts (Bernstein 2002). In short, regarding the question of ‘causes’, these films leave only the human condition and its inherent contradictions and antagonisms as a locus of speculation and, therefore, as the only site of possible reconciliation. Of course, it is necessary to accept that the term ‘evil’ (let alone its concept, essence or cause) remains an aporia with a vast history of philosophical, theological and psychological discourse, and continues to cause controversy. Accordingly, I am using the term in this thesis in a manner after Susan Neiman, who has argued that the term remains pivotal, whether in a philosophical or theological context, as a ‘problem about the intelligibility of the world as a whole [...] it belongs neither to ethics nor to metaphysics but forms a link between the two’ (Neiman 2004: 7-8). As such, it remains a concern of aesthetics – and the cinema – to engage in the exposure of its effect more than its cause. This effect of ‘evil’ – again after Neiman – can be summarised as ‘a way of marking the fact that it shatters our trust in the world’ (Neiman 2004: 9). Thereafter, ‘sin’, as evil’s theological equivalent, makes itself felt in the form of the cultural symbols it has created.

What is proposed is that, beginning with Muratova, a selection of contemporary directors stand out as having each delivered films that combine the symbols of a redemptive wager with the simultaneous refusal of all traditional, established representations. Four directors can be singled out as having made more than one film that turns on this central theme: Béla Tarr, specifically in his three collaborations with the novelist László Krasznahorkai, *Damnation* (1989), *Sátántangó* (1994), *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000); Ulrich Seidl, in particular his two fiction feature films *Dog Days* (2002) and *Import Export* (2008); Roy Andersson, with his short film *World of Glory* (1993)

that set the tone for his two subsequent features *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000) and *You the Living* (2008); and Gus Van Sant, in those specific works *Elephant* (2003) and *Last Days* (2005) that follow his dedication to Tarr with *Gerry* (2001). In addition, Artur Aristakisyan's *Palms* (1993), Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (2002) and Bruno Dumont's *Flanders* (2007) add individual titles to this list. This is not intended to represent a definitive conceptual category nor to qualify each director's oeuvre. Rather, it offers a recognisable cross-section of films from the period 1989 to the present that, it will be argued, reflect a new development in the burdened tradition of redemption as a Western narrative form. These films confront redemptive narratives and the means to negotiate violence and disintegration through their resistance to the qualifications of hindsight or the restoration of generic paradigms.

The selection of films from the years following 1989 is not coincidental. It places the films discussed within the context of the collapse of European communism and its aftermath; an era that has been controversially called 'post-historical' – a term retained here for descriptive purposes. This in itself locates these films as contemporaneous with conflicting accounts in critical and cultural theory that revolve around certain aporias that have been identified as a 'religious turn' in philosophy, or as Slavoj Žižek puts it when confronting head-on the combined legacies of Christianity and Marxism in the present era, the 'return of the religious dimension in all its different guises' (Žižek 2001, 1). At the same time, these films, that stretch from Eastern Europe (Muratova, Tarr, Aristakisyan, Sokurov) through Western Europe (Andersson, Dumont, Seidl) to the United States (Van Sant), are responsive to a milieu that is conditioned, however secular it may be said to have become, by a Western and therefore predominantly Christian theological, philosophical and narrative legacy.

Three central themes emerge for engaging with the question of redemption in respect of this grouping of contemporary cinematic fictions. Firstly, what is particular to these films that relates them to salvation and redemption and, therefore, by necessity, to fallibility and sin over and above individual or particular misdeeds? Secondly, having said that these films are all located in the present so-called 'post-historical' era, a context conditioned by relativism in place of old ideological certainties, what becomes of the teleological emphasis implicit in the structure of redemption? Thirdly, how does the question of redemption, as image or form, relate to the cinema and what, in fact, is in need of being redeemed? Does the question of the possibility or impossibility of redemption relate to the workings of cinema itself (as an aesthetic practice, or the

‘saving’ of the traces of reality within the context of its form) or to a representation of a redeemed humanity (a narrative, symbolic or conceptual practice), or something in between?

An initial introduction to *The Asthenic Syndrome* provides a sketch of how each theme is embedded. Muratova’s film records, through the depiction of a fragmented set of conditions, an emergent destructive chaos at the heart of Russian society ushered in by the collapse of seventy years of Communist rule. The film itself was completed in 1989 under a still Soviet film-making system: it was, in fact, the last film to be shelved under that system’s censorship regime reportedly due to an objection to foul language. It was finally premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in 1990 before being released later that year to Russian audiences (see Taubman 2005). Accordingly, its production marginally predates the eventual 1991 ‘end’ of the Soviet State as a recognised political entity (Smith 2002: 2) whilst documenting aspects of its disintegration from the inside. Its accumulative scenes of aggression, violence and anomie invoke an apocalyptic register: the Last Days of a Soviet eschatology that hindsight now confirms.

The film itself is divided into two parts. The first, in monochrome, follows the actions of a nurse in the immediate aftermath of her husband’s funeral. Driven by grief she takes seemingly perverse pleasure in the rejection of her fellow mourners and the verbal abuse of strangers in the streets before resigning from her job, insulting her former colleagues and picking up and then rejecting a pavement drunk after which the story abandons her in the midst of her attempts to remove a stain from her clothing. This inconclusive sequence of events is revealed to be a film playing at a Moscow cinema to a disgruntled and uninterested audience. The break introduces the second, longer section of the film, in colour, that accumulates a series of vignettes of public and domestic situations constantly disrupted by violence, confrontation, threat or suffering, and loosely configured around the central character of a narcoleptic schoolteacher, with his wife, mother-in-law, pupils, colleagues and neighbours. Jane Taubman summarises the film’s technique under the rubric of ‘Soviet Apocalypse’:

Asthenic Syndrome confronts and challenges the viewer, continually frustrating narrative expectations. Seemingly unstructured, it is built from a series of episodes involving and observed by her two main characters, which add up to a portrait of the era. The episodes form two stylistically distinct narratives, linked thematically by the psychological and

physical syndrome from which both characters suffer and structurally by rhyming images and episodes (Taubman 2005, 46).

The overall effect is of a society breaking apart under the stresses of so many human antagonisms. Yet the film collapses this antagonism, and the question of cause or consequence, into an apparently aporetic condition. Produced within the Soviet Union at the time of its final disintegration, it does not – since it cannot – account for the conditions in any definable historical sense. It is neither retrospective nor prophetic and as such is not strictly apocalyptic. The traditional apocalyptic couplet of *already* and *not yet* is suspended in the film whose only means is to express itself from the midst of crisis, in a stark, brutal and alienating world marked by cruelty, decay and helplessness, against which it can evidence no escape. All of this it delivers with an acute fictional realism combined with documentary record. Fictional scenarios are integrated with and within ‘documentary’ *mise-en-scène* – most explicitly in a school visit to the city pound for stray dogs: the actors, like the audience, forced into direct contact with those animals in cages awaiting death. What is crucially missing from this ‘apocalypse now’ is the narrative and prophetic structure that identifies an agent of salvation and the vision of a redeemed state: that which is always to come, the announcement and the image of the future, that gives the apocalyptic its proper and complete register (McGinn 1998: 36).

Twice over (at least) Muratova seems to question the possibility of redemption, its very concept, whether secular or religious. Early in the film, three old women lament the failure of the great Tolstoyan legacy to redeem the masses through the moral mission of art. Thereafter, the film’s final scene presents the suggestive and simultaneously corrupted image of its narcoleptic protagonist, the bearded, kenotic Nikolai, posed as in crucifixion and asleep on a Moscow subway train as it transports him into the tomb-like darkness of a tunnel. Such a loaded Christological form recalls its pictorial inheritance as *the* redemptive symbol of the Western world but one now seemingly stripped of any apparent narrative or doctrinal means, either political or religious, to achieve such a state. Through this combination of recognisable symbols and their apparent ineffectiveness Muratova’s film appears poised between identifying of the formula for a vanished salvation, as Vladimirsky suggests, and a nihilistic turn to absurdity and hopelessness that has been argued elsewhere (see Roberts 1999).

Muratova, however, insists through her choice of title on a shift of emphasis from the narrative to the conditional or symptomatic. She has characterised the titular syndrome as being ‘a condition of nervous exhaustion, resulting in inappropriate behaviour or lack of affect’ (in Taubman 2005: 45). It is a condition akin to a sickness and one that the film attributes not just to individuals but also to the society as a whole. Its symptoms infect all society, all humanity. Muratova has added when commenting on the film, ‘Mankind is everywhere, in general, the same. I see in the world a level of suffering and cruelty that surpasses understanding’ (in Taubman 2005: 45). Putting aside speculation about an author’s personal disposition, two questions resonate. The first asserts the fact and necessity of looking prior to an image of understanding, or a currency of images in a relationship of understanding. The second is the assertion of a sickness in terms of the human condition depicted. This, in itself, folds back into the question of looking: it is as an act of symptomatology, of showing the symptoms, rather than as diagnosis that Muratova conveys a human condition in conflict with itself.

Whichever side of the Russian soul to which Muratova might be said to incline – a soul Nikolai Berdiav, the great historian of the Russian psyche, proclaimed to be forever split by ‘a search for God and a militant godlessness’ among so many contradictions (in Kovalov 1999: 12) – the film demands to be seen as more than a one-sided commentary on the historical *mise-en-scène* of a collapsing Communist infrastructure or a mere refraction through the lens of a particular filmmaker’s apparent disillusion.

Certainly Muratova depicts a seemingly pervasive condition of human frailty and contradiction with no demonstrable image or figure of salvation. However, through its titular pathology, its symptomatic signs of exhaustion and fractured descriptions of random cruelty and abuse, the film testifies to a humanity that is apparently sick, and therefore positions itself in respect to a demand for something like redemption or salvation, above and beyond any more rational, humanist or political terms of improvement that might lie within the means of human competence and cinematic narrative. It is this withdrawal of any humanist or psychological formula that places redemption beyond any humanly autonomous reach. The title, underscored by so many seemingly illusory symbols of redemption, from the Christ figure of Nikolai to the failure of art to move an audience, poses the question of where or in what form human existence may find the means to extract itself from such pervasive antagonism, when the traditional structures of rhetorical redemption are so clearly under stress. From within this unflinching depiction of

wretchedness, cruelty and suffering, *The Asthenic Syndrome* begins to echo the terms of the fallibility that is at the heart of the Christian doctrine of the Fall: the consequence of ‘original sin’ that sees all of humanity as essentially degraded. Human beings then, are not only capable of sinful acts but actually disposed towards them and against what is good through their very condition of being human. Accordingly, in the model of the Fall it is only through Christ that the original state of bliss can be restored. It is this configuration to which the film enigmatically alludes at the very same time as it corrupts it. However, a reduction of the film to an expression of meaninglessness or absurdity would seem to impoverish interpretation. Such reduction merely claims that the failure to measure the social catastrophe the film depicts against existing paradigms prescribes a collapse into hopelessness or nihilism. However, the fact that Nikolai is asleep rather than dead when he enters the tunnel, together with the film’s continual provocations directed at its audience to wake up, to properly look at the ever-present contradiction of the human condition suggests a suspension and an exhortation that resists both a misanthropic nihilism and cynical exploitation of the cruel and barbaric.

The film’s denial of a ready-to-hand formula for redemption, either for any of its individual characters or their society as a whole, is, at the same time, coupled with a denial of an absolute descent into nothingness. The act of insisting upon the showing of such images, and we might be tempted to think of them as confessional since Muratova is herself part of the humanity depicted in its most dire situation, is invested with an urgency and necessity. In the midst of the images of condemned dogs in cages awaiting death Muratova inserts the provocative caption, ‘People don’t like to look at this. People don’t like to think about this. This should have no relation to discussions of good and evil’. The film asserts the necessity to show but in terms that resist the determination of a lesson or recourse to the textual paradigms of allegory or fable. Rather, it projects its images to the spectator, not as a code to be deciphered, but as images to be reflected upon in relation to their origin in the world and in dialogue with the self. Such are the minimal terms of the search for salvation that Vladimirsky detects.

It may be objected that the rejection of so many redemptive symbols in *The Asthenic Syndrome* merely points to their evident impossibility under conditions more akin to the Freudian diagnostic of ‘ineradicable evil’ (Bernstein 2002: 132). Repressed instincts buried in the human subconscious can never be fully eliminated and should not be confused with original sin since they are in no way attributable to a Fall or the result of a Free Will (even that of the original human

pair). Nevertheless, what separates the concept of original sin from that of instinct is its fundamental maintenance of the *possibility* of a cure, however wretched, sick or unredeemable the evidence seems to be. In a further contradiction, and despite Muratova's pessimism regarding the moral efficacy of art, the act of filming remains, as a contact between image and world, a possible transformative source, irrespective of whether an image of redemption is attainable or otherwise.

Stephen Mulhall outlines the relationship between 'sickness' and 'original sin' in a study of the lingering resonance of the Christian doctrine of the Fall in secular philosophy of the twentieth century (Mulhall: 2005a). In it he draws attention to a statement made by Ludwig Wittgenstein:

People are religious to the extent that they believe themselves to be not so much *imperfect* as *sick*. Anyone who is halfway decent will think himself utterly imperfect, but only the religious person thinks himself wretched (in Mulhall 2005a: 7).

Mulhall goes on to elaborate the distinction. A natural imperfection within the human condition, such as a raw component that requires nurturing, or imperfections that are the result of structures of social (political, economic) or biological (genetic, psychological) realms, do not lie outside of the human race and therefore, according to rationalist or Enlightenment thinking, the solutions ultimately lie within the scope of human action or intelligence. The doctrine of the Fall, by contrast, locates all immoral acts in the hands of the original human pair: the concept of 'original sin', or the overreaching of humankind to a status of knowledge equal with the divine; a knowledge that provides for the decisive freedom to choose evil over good. It then withdraws any solution from the possibilities of human perfectibility to place it in a realm outside of human achievement. Crucially, the contrary immorality of so many human actions (and the twentieth century offers a litany of the atrocities of which humankind is capable) determines a human condition that is essentially capable of being wrong, not only, as Mulhall puts it, 'in particulars', but 'in everything we do, and hence that nothing we initiate can right that wrong unless it is rooted in a moment of passivity, one in which we suffer the supplementation of an essential lack' (Mulhall 2005a: 10).

Mulhall argues that the theme of redemption remains present in secular philosophies and makes case studies of the works of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Such examples

recognise a ‘continental’ attitude to philosophy that is content to integrate literary, aesthetic and religious modes of discourse into its conceptual framework. These philosophers are inclined to see inherent contradictions in the phenomenon of existence, to the extent that contradiction is the distinctly human characteristic. Each philosopher, Mulhall argues, retains the resolution that the human condition is structurally perverse and resistant to its own grasp, and yet each is resolutely opposed to a divine source of transformation. As such, ‘We stand incomprehensibly in need of redemption, and we are incomprehensibly able to achieve it, through a certain kind of intellectual practice that is also a spiritual practice [...] a practice of enduring and embodying the human being’s constitutive resistance to its own grasp’ (Mulhall 2005a: 12).

This ‘incomprehensibility’ is what makes itself evident in the space that Vladimírsky opens up in Muratova’s film: the tension that surrounds the reflection that ‘at the same time’ the film cannot believe in the possibility of salvation and yet, through its indignant act of showing it calls upon salvation in its refusal of all historical, and as such, ‘man-made’, paradigms of redemption. In effect, *The Asthenic Syndrome* – and this is the observation that will be carried over to the films of Tarr, Seidl, Andersson, Van Sant, *et al.* – presents this embodiment and endurance of human contradiction at the limits of representation and signification. This limit situation will enable, as the following chapters will show, a rethinking of a mode of cinematic address informed by the expression of ‘sense’ developed by the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy; a configuration of experience that places itself between any transcendent condition of possibility and all empirical determinations of meaning. Nancy states that, ‘the element of sense is a reality indiscernibly and simultaneously empirical and transcendental, material and ideative, physical and spiritual’ (quoted in James 2006: 240 n.13). In addition, his integration of ‘sense’ into an aesthetic relation (extended in his writing to specific contemplation of the cinema) will allow for a renewed configuration of the concept of cinematic ‘realism’ (Chapter Four). Furthermore, ‘sense’, considered through the principle of *methexis* (a form problem that fully encapsulates a range of sensory associations in terms of participation, sharing and contagion) that Nancy applies *vis-à-vis* the artwork will help to illuminate aspects of the films that expose the spectator to a certain confessional element, the offering of truths embedded in the evident, real and material: that which is embodied in the films’ effect (Chapter Five).

What we find in Muratova’s rejection of the narrative expression of redemption or reconciliation, either as Tolstoyan moral argument or Christological myth, is a continued

insistence on testimony, in terms akin to revelation or disclosure, as the primary mode of cinematic address. In Muratova's specific case this is both a form of documentary witness (as with the condemned dogs in the city pound) and an enunciation through creation, oriented towards the cruel, barbaric, violent and destructive. It is a presentation and an act of insistence both prior to, and in excess of, the interpretative faculties of cause and effect or the proposition of reason. The film resists adopting any position regarding the status of redemption, picking up its clues or formulating its denials, either of which remains entangled in narrative configurations of redemptive formulae. Instead, and returning to the broader conviction of this thesis, *The Asthenic Syndrome* stands as the first of several films that emerge in the decade or so that follows the collapse of the Soviet Union to place this enigmatic 'limit situation' of redemption at their centre. It is a stance that necessarily problematises redemption's traditional paradigms, particularly those configured around violence. Violence, here, is defined in the general sense of a destructive force (event, condition, person or persons) exerted on a situation, and forms the most explicit image of human fallibility, immorality, antagonism and contradiction. Violence and antagonism, and the enigmatically corrupted society emerge as the most emphatic marks of the persistently conflicting nature of the human experience. It is the human condition itself that comes under scrutiny as being fundamentally in contradiction to its own best interests and for which violence is a propensity more than a measure, a pervasive condition beyond the misdeeds of individual agents.

This is not to deny the significance of the films' historical context. It is certainly reasonable to read these films in relation to the collapse of European communism and a crisis of capitalism. The divisive aspects of the capitalist system are pre-eminent, whether they are *imminent* (in the immediate post-Soviet context of Russia and Eastern Europe) or *immanent* (in the broader context of its universal dominance as a form of life in Western Europe and the US). Nevertheless, there remains the condition of being human itself, integral to the symptomatic social, economic and communal structures to which human beings subject themselves. It is this human condition that is essentially fallible.

References to fallibility and the state of 'fallenness' should not be taken to mean that *The Asthenic Syndrome*, or any of the other films outlined above, is determined by a religious way of thinking. None of them offers religious themes in the sense of giving narrative or pictorial representations of traditional Biblical dogma. Nevertheless, they *can* be characterised by a persistent, enigmatic and provocative reiteration of religious motifs and symbols ranging from

apocalyptic prognostications, messianic figures and apparent Holy Fools to corrupted religious iconography and resurrected dead. All of which points, at the very least, to a recognition that the secular is not free from the spectre of sin wherever a rational solution is not readily at hand in the midst of so many violent and destructive scenarios. In a double-bind, the films then undercut those same symbols, such that the religious terms of reference may themselves be the cause, rather than the solution, of the apparent wretchedness in evidence. As such, by filming events without recourse to decisive narrative, political or religious strategies, it is redemption from the normative terms of redemption that ultimately constitutes the primary question.

Stephen Mulhall's reading of key thinkers in twentieth century philosophy finds the locus of redemption in the relation between an 'intellectual practice that is also a spiritual practice' (Mulhall 2005a: 12), the terms of which form the debate. What is at stake, and hence the justification of the terms of redemption above and beyond those humanly self-sufficient modes of discourse, is the initial conception of a human condition that has relinquished the means of its own freedom to become enslaved by its own self; in short, humankind has placed its recovery beyond its own reach (Mulhall 2005a: 9). For Nietzsche, this is to be found in the commitment to Christianity itself. For Heidegger, productionist metaphysics systematically turns humankind away from taking an interest in the true nature of all things. For Wittgenstein, it is the human being's linguistic inheritance that subverts the humanity it brings into being (Mulhall 2005a: 118-120). It is then, through the recognition of 'moments of passivity' that bring forth a realisation of a 'supplementation' – an intellectual practice that is also a *spiritual* practice – that a 'lack' may be recognised.

Such contemplation chimes with certain aesthetic conceptions of the cinema, especially those that evoke its revelatory or reconciliatory potential (a central theme in the writings of André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer) and the ability of its 'passive' apparatus to reach beyond the screen of symbolic representations towards something like a real condition of existence. At the same time, as the critics of Bazin and Kracauer were keen to point out, such a formula also characterises the cinema as the purveyor of illusions and deceptions – derived from a reductive equivalence of perception to ideology (Stam *et al.* 1992: 187) – that contributes to the conception of a human nature that is always already diverting itself from a relation to truth and understanding. Both the cinema and the conditions it presents become the combinatory site of a structurally perverse, corrupted or 'fallen' state. Such is the fundamental contention of Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du*

cinéma (1989-98). However, at the same time, Godard maintains that the cinema is redeemable or transformative, not from any prescribed transcendental source, but from within. At its core is an essentially intellectual cinematic practice that is also a spiritual practice in its recovery of a realism based on a cinematic contact between image and world. This particular position, and Jean-Luc Nancy's subtle distinction from it is the principle focus of Chapter Three.

Mulhall's account of the distinctive undercurrents of the 'fallen' and the 'redemptive' in Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein identifies three principle consistencies and recurrences. In the first place there is the idea of 'God as nothing', as no thing or a non-entity. To conceive of a God as something in particular, whether affirming or denying a divine existence, and to allow for any conceptual characteristics is to lapse into superstition or idolatry. Secondly, there is the question of a 'linguistic confusion, an opacity in our life with words, as a marker of our perverseness', most evident in a certain deconstructive manoeuvre that calls into question and thereby collapses the traditional relations of signifier and signified. Thirdly, there is 'the idea of an unending oscillation between experiencing our condition as a limit and as a limitation'. This last, Mulhall says – in terms that can be heard to chime with the rhetoric of an ontologically realist idea of the cinema's relation to the world – implies the distinguishing of the 'necessary from the contingent' as a 'spiritual as well as a logical matter' (Mulhall 2005a: 14).

A consistently similar set of guiding themes or dominant unifying characteristics can not only be recognised in *The Asthenic Syndrome* but also reflected in the films of Tarr, Andersson, Seidl, Van Sant, *et al.* The recurrent corruption of Christian symbols and doctrines points to a secular, at times anti-religious, 'loss of faith', an abandonment of the transformational powers invested in the images and iconography of organised religion that critiques their continued resonance within contemporary culture. The terms of language are two-fold: the necessity of 'showing' rather than 'telling' in forms of accumulative montage that deny the conventions of cinematic 'language' (of clear exposition and interpretation) is coupled to a short-circuit of diegetic language, of human communication that falters and fails and is reduced to silences, endless banalities of daily life, swearing and cursing, incoherent rambling and provocative accusation in place of exposition, justification or psychological determination. The act of 'showing' and its elevation of the shot (as an accumulation of signifiers or an excess of signification in the image) is preferred to a rational, dialectic or cause-and-effect related articulation and economy of meaning, one that would prioritise montage and traditional editing logic as a locus of

meaning. Instead, these films emphasise the notion of the shot itself as the site and limit situation of signification.

Mulhall's study provides a background of transferable themes that resonate with the human condition presented in these films. This thesis makes no claims to evaluate the terms or implications of Mulhall's philosophical study. The point is, rather, that a sensing of the persistent overtones of a dogged and deeply provocative tradition provides the inspiration for unlocking particular aspects of the films outlined above and, moreover, can be found to evoke and re-energise certain film-theoretical discourses, notably those with both 'realist' and 'transcendental' perspectives. Furthermore, the thinkers with whom Mulhall engages, Nietzsche and Heidegger especially, remain central to the context of 'post-history'. The critical and philosophical discourses so influential to the present era, cast most often as post-modernity (and out of which these films emerge), derive from these thinkers. It is from them that the proposition of an 'end' or 'exhaustion' of metaphysics that underpins the phenomenon of 'endism' generally can be traced. Their influence can be found behind a range of announcements of an end to such concepts as history, ideology, grand narratives, modernity, Marxism, humanism or religion (Sim 1999: 12).

The real or theoretical collapse of so many teleological structures and binary oppositions is a crucial factor in the relationship between contemporary realist oriented films and the world to which they refer. Some films emerged directly from within the Communist Bloc's agonising demise and eventual conversion to the Western free-market economy, others from within that economy. In both situations the status of the capitalist system in the midst of these historical events had taken on a heightened rhetorical resonance. It found its apogee in Francis Fukuyama's controversial, apocalyptic, and now largely anachronistic declaration of triumphant liberal democracy, *The End of History and the Last Man*, published in 1992. Fukuyama's declaration of an end to particular conceptions of History as forms of evolutionary, or even eschatological, processes working towards specific ideological goals has been well documented. In his opinion, the end of European communism signalled the 'apocalypse now', the arrival of the 'best possible solution to the human problem' (in Sim 1999: 21): universal liberal democracy. Present social inequalities were simply a matter of delay as developing nations caught up economically and politically with a fully liberal-democratic, free-market system. The question of a 'people' – the paradigm whose emancipation or mythic unification had underpinned totalitarianisms both communist and fascist – is buried in the general exchange equivalence of an abstracted

‘democracy’. However towards the close of his book, the scattered masses reappear as a reiteration of the Old Testament problem, as it is the ‘last men’ themselves that become the systems’ only potential threat: ‘The life of the last man is one of physical security and material plenty’, and therefore, Fukuyama asks, is there a danger ‘that we will be happy on one level, but still dissatisfied with ourselves on another, and hence ready to drag the world back into history with all its wars, injustice, and revolutions?’ (in Sim 1999: 22).

Muratova’s film (and all of those discussed in this thesis) confounds any such premonitions of a new or existing world order formulated and operated on the basis of a victorious free-market ideology. Such confidence is dispelled under the weight of a more fundamental human condition mired in selfishness, indifference and sudden, rupturing violence; on physical acts dislocated from evident motives and operating in an apparent spiritual vacuum. None of which is an apology for a socio-political system whose weak link is its populace. Rather, it is the question of the systems failing the people or the people failing the systems that cuts to the heart of the conditions of human suffering; of a human interaction laced with so many debilitating consequences, as the people seek to cope with, endorse or prop up the systems of their own creation.

Each of the films highlighted, in some way, contains cases of mental and physical breakdown, along with alcoholism, abusive rage, outbursts of violence and helpless malaise that can lead to suicide. Collectively, the content of all of these films is driven by an underlying threat of violence or destruction. Once again, such content is cut loose from the interpretative frameworks for these conditions and is presented through an observational catalogue of the symptoms of a pervasive wretchedness, an apparent sickness stripped of the articulation of a cure. In a recent study of violence, Slavoj Zizek has sought to separate what he calls the ‘subjective’ violence (that attributed to individual protagonists) from a deeper ‘objective’ violence that silently underpins the ‘smooth functioning of our economic and political systems’ (Zizek 2009: 1). It is a *sickness* made evident through a symptomatology of violence, antagonism, destruction and decay through which these films communicate.

In terms of their formal strategies, these films present their accumulation of pervasive sickness through a disjointed, episodic and purely descriptive formula employed at the expense of more prescriptively developed forms of editing logic, including certain modernist modes of subjective or subject-oriented discourse. Moreover, what is striking about them is their elevation of the conditions of suspense. They create an excess of suspense, continually deferring narrative

momentum and withholding revelation; continually resisting the completion of any narrative or interpretative strategy. Collectively they favour a stark, forensic use of the cinematic shot (either as lengthy, complex sequence or studied, individual tableau). They assemble fragmentary structures depicting multiple, often unconnected characters. Where the focus is on particular individuals or integrated groups, they withdraw the traditional modes of empathy and subjectivity: reaction shots, point-of-view shots. The overall technique is one that accentuates the accumulative effect of the shots over and above the integrity of a determined, conceptual discourse. In what might be described as an excess of looking and lingering, the films harbour this impassive suspense determined by the force of presentation: a staring into the face of human folly, cruelty, barbarity, and its helplessness and suffering in the manner of a painting by Bosch or Bruegel. Yet what takes the place of the traditional signs of redemption is the limit situation of the movement towards a redemptive possibility. The trajectory of symbolic redemption is replaced by the tense hiatus of suspense left by the withdrawal of fallibility's overcoming in the terms configured by the cinema's linear movement. At the extreme, films such as *The Asthenic Syndrome*, *Sátántangó*, and *Elephant* deliberately confront the terms of their own endings as a change of register. They create formal shifts (distinct from open-ended forms of character-oriented narrative) that allude to an interruption of the possibility of producing narrative. Instead, the images are positioned as an allusive demand for something more than the traditional interpretative models are seemingly able to provide, be they narrative, political or religious.

However, there is no claim being made that the films of Muratova, Tarr, Seidl, Andersson, Van Sant and others demonstrate a uniquely radical change in cinematic style. Certainly their fundamental techniques can be traced through a lineage of earlier styles, notably the tendency towards the formal motifs of the passive, distanced camera and the sequence shot that is a legacy of post-war modernism, though it equally recalls the very earliest of the (so-called) 'primitive' or 'pre-narrative' cinema of 'monstration' prior to 1910. Such stylistic methods are also central to the work of key directors found in a range of contemporary cinema, most notably from directors in the Middle East and Asia – in the work of Abbas Kiarostami and Hou Hsiao-hsien, Jia Zhang-ke and Hirokazu Kore-eda, for instance. Crucially, however, these 'Eastern' film-makers refuse the images of degradation, violence and catastrophe that are central to the Western films. The manner in which Kiarostami treats the catastrophe of a major earthquake in *Life and Nothing More* (1992), Kore-eda refers to the aftermath of a mass killing by an apocalyptic

cult in *Distance* (2003), and Jia documents the effects of the destruction of villages to make way for the Three Gorges Dam project in *Still Life* (2006) speaks of a marked difference in approach, orientation and disposition. What is so apparent in these films, distinct from their Western counterparts, is a sense of passing, of time moving on, with, in each case, human protagonists integrated into this all-consuming passage, not driven by traditional Western dramaturgical forces or conventions (to find redemption or be redeemed, to succeed or fail in some given act or principle); in short, they are oriented towards co-existing rather than overcoming. They do not circulate, as the Western films do, around the redemptive economy of Christological, sacrificial, sanctified or Heavenly symbols and motifs, suspending and awaiting future events. Instead they are inclined to play on the continuance and intentionlessness of a passage through life or some part of it. It is a play that Jean-Luc Nancy has highlighted in a commentary dedicated to the style and the title of Kiarostami's *Life and Nothing More*. Nancy emphasises the title's French translation, *And Life Goes On* (Nancy 2001, 58) in this respect; a play reiterated in the titles *Distance*, and that chosen for English translation, *Still Life*.

What is distinctive in the Western films, by contrast, is their explicit dwelling within and suspending of, both the immanence and imminence of the violent and destructive and the structural hiatus that encapsulates this suspension. Rather than passing through an eternal flux, these films dislocate the events of rupture from their narrative models and at the same time problematise their own structural 'ends'. As a result they create a hiatus in the rhetoric of ends and new beginnings that characterises the Western redemptive attitude.

With this in mind, it is not so much a matter of describing or labelling a new or additional form of cinematic style or adding to what might already be the continual identification of 'time-images' in the manner of Gilles Deleuze's taxonomy of cinematic signs. Such a preoccupation with labelling and semiotic categorisation already speaks of a Western fascination with images in themselves, as meaning or concept, and the circulation of 'representations'. Whether the films in question are stylistically beholden to 'modernist' or 'post-modernist' techniques is of little consequence. Rather, it is a question of the relation the images bear to the world they inhabit, which formed and informed them, and which informs the narrative structures and sense-making systems of Western social and historical conditions. It is a question of whether certain doctrinal legacies of the Western approaches to thought and to being human retain a currency in these films' disposition towards the western world, and most notably, the presence of violence in its

broadest, conditional sense. It is here that symbolic and narrative links between violence and redemption are located, in the soteriological mythology of a religion imbued with violence, sacrifice, and human fallibility, that has also provided the cinema's central myth in the binary of redemption through violence. It is this myth that these films ultimately confront.

This confrontation, or the interruption of the myth of fallibility, and a progression from violence to redemption, leads towards the final readings of the outlined films that are informed by the work of Jean-Luc Nancy. Nancy's principal themes of 'transimmanence' (the interruptive relation of the symbolic to the phenomenological) and of 'syncopation' (the alternation of presentation and withdrawal that directs all philosophical and aesthetic gestures) provide the orientations for exploring the questions set out at the beginning: (i) that of the symbolism evident in each of the films; (ii) their relation to a wider 'post-historical' context; and (iii) the locus of redemption and a repositioning of the terms of a cinematic realism that retains a form of redemptive demand in its insistence on embodying and enduring so many human contradictions.

Chapter One begins with question (i) and an outline of the key symbols at work in the films of Tarr, Seidl, Andersson, Van Sant, Muratova, Aristakisyan, Sokurov, and Dumont. The starting point for measuring these symbols comes from the work of Paul Ricoeur, in particular his schematic for the 'symbolism of evil' (Ricoeur 1967). Ricoeur attempts to provide a hermeneutic recovery of the meaning of 'evil' in relation to human experience. Beginning with a phenomenological investigation of the relations between the voluntary and the involuntary in human nature, he derives a fact of existence that combines the aspects of freedom and necessity within free will around an inherent fallibility. Ricoeur's philosophy is formulated from within a commitment to Christianity and, as such, retains its mythology in an attempt to recover a moral philosophy. For Ricoeur, the human being is fallen. However, a structure of myth then proceeds from defilement, through sin, to guilt as the movement of freedom to conscience. Ricoeur's schematic symbolism allows for an account of the mythical symbols as they are consistent within the films of the selected directors and therefore, provides the basis for establishing the currency of violence, antagonism and redemption. However, it is in fact the interruption of such myths that propels the subsequent enquiry, derived from Jean-Luc Nancy's critique of the insufficiency of myths to properly account for existence – an enquiry that has led him to locate Christian mythology as the driving force of a broader metaphysical impasse.

Chapter Two, focusing on question (ii), attempts to contextualise this impasse – what Nancy has subsequently termed the ‘deconstruction of Christianity’ (Nancy 2008b: 139) – as a means to move away from Ricoeur’s Christian-centred symbolism to a non-religious configuration of the continuing symbols of that tradition. This chapter explores the relationship with ‘post-history’, working from the Christian legacy within nihilism, through Jacques Derrida’s contemplation of teleological structures and the concept of a ‘hauntology’ put forward in *Specters of Marx*, to Nancy’s overarching philosophy of ‘sense’. Nancy rejects Christianity and follows both Heidegger and Derrida in a deconstructive approach that also attempts to reposition the mythic structure of symbols, through their interruption, incompleteness and excess, as a formula for an always already being-in-the-world – a form of realism that can inform the aesthetic.

Chapter Three, in response to question (iii), sets out the initial terms by which the cinema itself has become the locus of an aesthetic redemption. It takes as its starting point Jean-Luc Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1989), in which Godard – in something like a hermeneutic recovery of lost meaning after Ricoeur – announces ‘The Image will come at the Resurrection’. Godard’s film, along with both practical and theoretical accounts by Chris Marker, Guy Debord, Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben, sets out to right the wrongs of history and to settle cinema’s accounts, that is, to reassert the ‘real’ of the image and the dialectic of montage as a ‘truth’ behind the power politics of history. This discussion serves to introduce the relationship between montage, as the necessary and inevitable articulation of cinematic meaning, and the cinematic shot itself in relation to the world it depicts. Such works revolve around the rescuing of a ‘true’ cinematic image from its corruption in a century of ‘stories’. Fascinated by images and their ideological representations, these practitioners and theorists insist on montage as the means to explode the traditions imposed through the terms of narrative and historical realism. However, behind their questioning of the terms of the real is the assertion that it is the real that must be emancipated if the cinema is to be redeemed. Jacques Rancière’s analysis of cinema is recalled, since he challenges the determinedly reflexive discourse present to argue that the cinematic image always already contains the means to its own deconstruction. Also, these projects (whose accountable histories terminate in the 1980s) propose an ‘end of history’: a summation of the twentieth century that is synthesised with the century of cinema. Such a perspective overemphasises the binary conditions of a cinema history linked to an oppositional stance between a ‘classical’ Hollywood and an ‘anti-narrative’ Europe that is also a politics of

capitalism/communism. It is the years that follow the collapse of European communism that this thesis addresses through the proposition that it is a certain relationship to cinematic realism rather than modes of narrative representation – a ‘presentation’ in respect of the ‘real world’, following Nancy – that is given a renewed urgency.

Chapter Four, then, develops Jean-Luc Nancy’s non-representational realism in relation to the cinema and, in particular, points to his post-phenomenological perspective on the artwork in distinction to the predominantly phenomenological approaches to realism in earlier film theoretical discourse. A comparison is made with the realist issues that underpin works by Wim Wenders and Werner Herzog; works that operate at the threshold of the historical and contextual conundrum of ‘modernism’/‘post-modernism’ with stories of violence and fallibility. Nancy’s perspective of the artwork as a fragment of experience or ‘sense’ of the world is seen as reflected in the approach of Herzog, who seeks to locate an irreducible experience of the sublime and the everyday within the filmed image, as opposed to Wenders, whose meditations on the cinematic image remain within the modernist framework of an opposition between the contingent, or real, and the fictive, or narrative. The locus and function of the real in the films of Wenders and Herzog follows a trajectory informed by the revelatory and redemptive functions attributed to realism by the critics André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer and the ‘spiritual’ and ‘mystical’ aspects of realism present in the theories developed by Paul Schrader and Gilles Deleuze. The consequence, however, is to propose that, despite the stylistic similarities between the films of a realist/modernist aesthetic and those of the ‘post-historical’ films of Muratova, Seidl, Andersson, Tarr, and Van Sant, the formula for such critique, with its attempts to shore up either an existential existence of the subject or an ahistorical ground of the real, each with an underlying redemptive or utopian function, is misaligned with the problems presented in the latter films. It is, thereafter, through Jean-Luc Nancy’s particular mode of aesthetic presentation, of ‘transimmanence’ and ‘syncopation’, that a fragment of ‘sense’, or of world, without redemptive claims but nevertheless retaining an insistence and a demand, comes closer to the operational means of these films and to the affect of their content. These films present a ‘felt contact’ with the stress, distress and anxiety of their depicted conditions whilst creating cinematic conditions of continual suspense that leaves such tensions unreleased. This insistence derives from the recognition of situations prior to any developed means of diagnosis presenting a ‘felt contact’ with conditions of stress or distress whose tension remains unreleased.

Chapter Five explores Nancy's formulae through a discussion of Gus Van Sant's 2003 film *Elephant*. Initially working from Pier Paolo Pasolini's analysis of the cinematic 'long take' as the primordial element of a cinematic 'present', the formal technique that drives Van Sant's film, this chapter identifies the film's relationship with its specific historical event and details a series of responses to that event – from critical reviews, related films, and theoretical discourse – that *Elephant* eschews or withdraws from. This serves to introduce, via the themes identified by Rancière, the aesthetic response to a cinema of 'looking' as the opening onto 'sense' put forward by Jean-Luc Nancy. The terms of his approach to the cinema – and to aesthetics and the artwork more broadly – are derived from a confluence of historical and theoretical conditions that shift the ontological emphasis that underpins such aesthetics. In particular, Nancy's recent development of the term *methexis* (integrating its etymological linking of participation, sharing, contagion) provides the underlying diagnostic reference for the affect of violence on screen, its attraction and its retreat. Nancy's approach seeks a fidelity to the real as such. As Laura McMahon writes: 'the material and the transcendental are mutually interruptive of one another; opening onto this mode of mutual interruption, here the cinema restates itself in its relation to the sense of the world – its truths embedded in the evident, the material, the real' (McMahon 2010: 82). This fidelity suggests a form of 'phenomenology of confession' (as set out by Ricoeur) where the terms of immorality and fallibility are dependent on the possibility of their recognition in consciousness (Ricoeur 1967: 101). However, Nancy resists the unnecessary religiosity of this conception by reinscribing the opening of 'sense' itself as the 'Open of proclamation' (Nancy 2008c: 156): that which directs 'sense' or existence back to the receiver as a felt coexistence or shared recognition. It is in our distress, Nancy has claimed, that we come to know our coexistence (in Lingis 1997: 197).

Chapters Six to Ten develop readings of particular films with respect to the diagnostic principles set out above. They are categorised around the terms set out by Paul Ricoeur for the 'symbolism of evil' – those of defilement, sin and guilt. Accordingly, Chapter Six explores Bruno Dumont's *Flanders* through the image conjured by its title, of war as an historical 'stain' or defilement of the landscape. Contrary to the depiction of war through a genealogy of mythic paradigms, *Flanders* suggests the spectre of war as a matter of 'sense' interrupting the lives of the landscape's occupants and, furthermore, interrupting the relation between war and destiny.

Chapter Seven continues the theme of ‘stain’ or defilement, this time with respect to the ‘hauntology’ (in Derrida’s terms) of the lingering legacy, replete with violence, of the Soviet century in the post-Soviet states. *The Asthenic Syndrome* is linked to Artur Aristakisyan’s *Palms* and Alexander Sokurov’s *Russian Ark*, through their differing but recurrent engagement with the theme of the loss of vision. *The Asthenic Syndrome*, as already noted, confronts the possibility of salvation; *Palms* addresses the obscuring of those people abandoned in the wake of communism’s collapse; and *Russian Ark* presents a vision of culture and its eclipse within history. Each film ultimately emphasises ‘vision’ not as the revelation of an idea but as the tension of its potential loss through obscurity, forgetfulness or the oblivion of history.

Chapters Eight and Nine shift the symbolic emphasis from defilement to ‘sin’, where sin comes about, in Ricoeur’s terms, ‘once a society has a concept of God’ (Simms 2003: 22). In Chapter Eight, Belá Tarr’s *Sátántangó* and Roy Andersson’s *Songs from the Second Floor* present conditions of ‘sin’ – antagonism, contradiction, violence – that are bound by acts of impotence that lead people towards a reliance on idolatry, false messiahs, and assorted pleas to transcendent bodies. However, the failure of these metaphysical sources of salvation is less a descent into a manifest nihilism than it is an exposure of the limit situation of nihilism and a necessary negativity that exposes, or ‘confesses’ to, the ‘real’ of the experiential world.

Chapter Nine, focusing on Tarr’s later film, *Werckmeister Harmonies*, compares the apocalyptic overcoming of the non-human, or ‘animal’ aspect of humanity (derived from the myth of original sin) as presented in the 1967 film *Quatermass and the Pit*, with Tarr’s film to suggest that Tarr draws attention to the act of controlling the animal within the human as the opening of ‘sense’ as the recognition of the limits of signifying myth, and therefore to the suspension of the traditional image of its overcoming.

Chapter Ten responds to the final element in Ricoeur’s symbolism, that of ‘guilt’, through two films by Ulrich Seidl, *Dog Days* and *Import Export*, and Roy Andersson’s most recent film, *You the Living*. Each film configures a series of impressions of ‘guilt’, of situations resonating with, in Ricoeur’s terms, ‘our anticipation of punishment that accompanies *our own* sinful deeds’ (in Simms 2003, 23). This is accentuated by their ‘confessional’ style, their framing and presentation of guilt, and the subjects’ effective suffering, not only within the context of character experiences and situational vignettes, but also as a form of direct visual address that commits to a ‘sense’ of being-in-common between film and spectator.

In summary, this thesis aims to show that these films act as something like a ‘confession’ of the resistant and contradictory antagonisms and violence at the heart of human experience. This is, however, stripped of any religious or scriptural connotations such that, following Jean-Luc Nancy, it creates an opening onto ‘sense’ as a presentation of the real of the world located around a continual movement that denies the synthesis of traditional narrative forms. It remains a kind of ‘confession’, in the most rudimentary sense of ‘an utterance of man about himself’ (Ricoeur 1967: 4), since these films are fictions and not expressly acts of witnessing. Contrary to critiques of these films that see them as reflecting only meaninglessness and misanthropy, the effect of this opening onto sense is to give evidence of a necessary negativity. In opposition to a full rejection or transformation of negativity, or any reifying positivity, these films – seemingly in contradiction of themselves – maintain a demand oriented towards redemption. Such a redemption, as an aesthetic practice, is reconfigured away from the representation of a debt to be repaid and towards a non-representational realism that exposes, through the interruption and suspension of norms and presuppositions, the instance of fallibility as coincident with the viewer exposed to the impossibility of complete knowledge or transformation.

PART ONE

History, Context, Style

CHAPTER 1

Films of Fallibility: the ‘Symbols of Evil’ and the Interruption of ‘Sin’

This first chapter will focus on qualifying the various films listed in the introduction in terms of their relation to the themes of human fallibility and its symbols. As already noted, each of the films, by Muratova, Tarr, Andersson, Seidl, Van Sant, *et al.*, is configured around various acts of violent rupture or systemic antagonism and disruption. More particularly, however, such events and conditions remain in each case innate, ineffable or else emerge from seemingly inexplicable causes. In short, such disruptive events and situations effectively provide the conditional locus of a human experience derived from contradiction, antagonism, conflict, and suffering.

Each of the different films describes these acts, events, instances or situations of disruption both in respect of, and in apparent resistance to, a series of symbolic images and themes indicative of traditional, doctrinal, and narrative modes of redemption. These range from Christological images such as the kenotic Nikolai in *The Asthenic Syndrome*, to the equally kenotic figure of Irimaís, the ‘false messiah’, in *Sátántangó*, and the corrupted plastic crucifixes at a sales conference that recur in *Songs from the Second Floor*. *Palms* organises its impressions within a Christian timeframe dating from the crucifixion of Christ, whilst Van Sant’s *Last Days* concludes with an image of ghostly resurrection. *Sátántangó*, *Werckmeister Harmonies*, *Songs from the Second Floor*, and *You the Living* each contain apocalyptic prognostications, sacrificial rites or versions of catastrophic destruction that continue to evoke the apocalyptic within the secular. *Dog Days*, *Import Export*, *Palms*, *Flanders*, *Songs from the Second Floor* and *You the Living* all make direct reference to sin and human guilt.

In addition to so many specifically religious symbols, these films also contain certain symbolic and narrative characteristics that resonate with redemptive references. Sickness and wretchedness, selfishness and vengeful egos, the burdens of suffering, the trials of Job, long and torturous journeys, the oblivion or limbo of lost souls remain consistent tropes in the mythic

paradigms of trials, tribulations, and redemption along with the cosmologically inflected symbols of light and dark, sun and moon and vision and blindness.

Such a list of symbols is derived from those set out in an account of the mythic structures of sin, guilt and fallibility – more generally collated under the term ‘evil’ – in the work of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur has developed a substantial body of texts directed at a hermeneutic epistemology of foundational, mythic and narrative formulae. Particularly in work initiated in the 1950s and 1960s, he addressed these symbols as they operated under the conditional terms of good and evil. The key works, *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil* (both 1960) applied initial dialectic and phenomenological approaches to the development of what would later become Ricoeur’s hermeneutic method. As Karl Simms points out, Ricoeur was and remained a consistently, even overtly, Christian philosopher and, for this reason, the terms of good and evil were central to his early explorations of the human dialectic of free will and necessity (Simms 2003: 9). Ricoeur’s hermeneutic method with regard to good and evil was to identify the mythic symbols that, he asserted, provided the foundation for the human recognition of the consciousness of evil and sin. That is, myths were the recognition of human fallibility and the basis for its confrontation. In Ricoeur’s thesis it is precisely because of myths that humankind can be said to be ‘fallen’, since myths – the foundational narratives of human existence, creation, suffering, salvation; in short, origins and ends – underscore an essential consciousness of human fallibility. They are the intentional encoding of the mysterious experience of human fallibility.

In *The Symbolism of Evil* Ricoeur establishes a set of inter-related categories for the conceptual movement of fallibility, through sin to guilt – the effective movement from necessity to consciousness. Within each category he sets out the type and function of particular myths that are immediately recognisable in the above films. Ricoeur’s categories account for the cosmological and creation symbols of light and dark, sun and sky, horizons and distances, through the symbols of journeys and deviations, missed targets, straying from paths, revolts and rebellions, lack and suffering, vice and vengeful selves. From this list we can recall the journeys and obstacles that structure *Import Export* and *Flanders*, the revolts and rebellions that irrupt in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, *Songs from the Second Floor*, and *Elephant*, vice and vengeance at the heart of *Sátántangó*, *Dog Days*, and *Elephant*, the lack and suffering of *Palms*, *You the Living*, *The Asthenic Syndrome*, and *Dog Days*, and (for reasons to be elaborated in Chapter Seven) the oblivion and ‘lost soul’ of Russian culture that underpins *Russian Ark*.

Myths, for Ricoeur, mean ‘not a false explanation by means of images and fables, but a traditional narration which relates to events that happened at the beginning of time and which has the purpose of providing grounds for the ritual actions of men of today, and in a general manner, establishing all the forms of action and thought by which man understands himself in his world’ (Ricoeur 1967: 5). Whether we accept this particular concept of myth is of less concern here than the typology of the myths themselves. In fact, as we move towards Jean-Luc Nancy’s conception of ‘interrupted myths’ (Nancy 1991: 43) it will in fact be the very excess and lack of completion of these myths that will be of more significance. However, at this point, Ricoeur’s categories provide the most resonant and explicit criteria for establishing the films’ initial provocations and the formulae that they will ultimately make problematic.

To establish Ricoeur’s categories in more detail, however, requires a slight detour through the means by which he arrives at them. Karl Simms has summarised Ricoeur’s methods succinctly in an overview of the philosopher’s relevance for literary theory, and he sets out the context for Ricoeur’s overarching project: ‘Ricoeur’s philosophy is motivated by a Christian need to explain the origins of evil in the world, and thus to answer the questions that this problem carries with it, such as *Why* is there evil in the world?, and *Why* do people commit evil deeds?’ (Simms 2003: 10).

Beginning from a phenomenological base, Ricoeur constructs a dialectic between the involuntary and the voluntary – between the will and the passions. Ricoeur isolates three modes of willing: decision (the formation of an act or plan), movement (the carrying out of an action) and consent (the acquiescence to necessity). Each of these modes involves the wills’ opposite involuntary modes, which Simms highlights: ‘the decision is tempered by motivation, the movement of the body is tempered by involuntary motion, and consent is tempered by necessity’ (Simms 2003: 12). The relevance of this phase is simply to establish the basis from which to challenge the Cartesian *cogito*. The role of the involuntary is to locate the mystery that underpins the sterility of the Cartesian claim to self-knowledge: ‘the Ego must more radically renounce the covert claim of all consciousness, must abandon its wish to posit itself, so that it can receive the nourishing and inspiring spontaneity which breaks the sterile circle of the self’s constant return to itself’ (in Simms 2003: 13). Simms summarises Ricoeur’s intentions:

The Cartesian sees the person as divided into the body, which as an object has *objective* experience, and a soul, which has *subjective* existence. In removing the distinction between soul and body – or, more precisely, in demonstrating that a soul is impossible, so long as we are in the world, without a body – Ricoeur unites the objective and the subjective under the single heading of ‘existence’ (Simms 2003: 13).

However, for Ricoeur, the problem of ‘existence’ is not a philosophical problem but a *mystery* – where a mystery, unlike a problem, is not something to be solved but something to be acknowledged as not requiring an answer, and as such relocates the problem to one of morals, ethics or politics. The conditions of existence, derived from the conflicting modes of the voluntary and the involuntary, generate the paradoxical mystery of what Ricoeur calls ‘limit concepts’ (Ricoeur 1966: 486). These configure the operations of specifically human freedoms that are limited by their negative concepts – derived from needs, habits, and emotions – and which are open to rejection.

Likewise, we will find that it is the notion of limits, or the ‘limit situation’, that forms the locus of Jean-Luc Nancy’s perspective. The key difference of the latter’s approach, above and beyond his rejection of the Christian infrastructure, is the claim that it is through an attention to the terms of the limit situation itself that the provision of an opening onto human experience can be established. For Ricoeur, it is, rather, a matter of the ‘limit concept’ as the initiation of a necessary recovery of meanings. Nancy’s important difference will become apparent with respect to a reconfiguration of aesthetics from representation to presentation in the following chapters.

Ricoeur further develops his theme of existence along existentialist lines that lead to the importance of representational symbols. He remains within the sphere of the Christian inflected existentialism of Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers – for whom God, being outside the world, does not exist as such, and only human beings have existence because, unlike animals, for instance, they have knowledge or consciousness of it. In Sartre’s materialist and therefore more atheist version of existentialism – whereby physical reality is the only reality – meaningful existence is formed by choice and decision (again only a human capacity). Sartre’s perspective influences Ricoeur’s position with respect to action, but essentially Ricoeur retains Jaspers’ perspective that interpretation is of equal importance to action in forming human life (Simms 2003: 15).

Interpretation, then, leads Ricoeur to his hermeneutic recovery of the meaning of symbols with respect to the problem of good and evil. It is as a result of the mystery of the conflicting voluntary and involuntary aspects of human existence that humanity is fallible. This mysterious, paradoxical conflict creates a fragile human being, one constantly struggling with the discordant effects generated by the contradictions of voluntary and involuntary gestures. It is these contradictions that give rise to humankind's fallibility and the *possibility* of evil. In effect, Ricoeur is re-inscribing the concept of original sin, since the fallible nature of existence leads to the possibility of immorality: 'the *possibility* of moral evil is inherent in man's constitution' (Ricoeur 1965: 203).

This schema, derived from the hypothesis that the human being is structured through a disjunction between will and necessity, leads to the '*ratio* of fallibility' (in Simms 2003: 16) – a kind of measure for the human being's fallibility located on a disproportionate relation of the self to the self and the level of non-coincidence this generates. In *Fallible Man*, Ricoeur finds three distinct ways in which this disproportion can be measured and from which the human being's fragility is determined. These three ways are diagnosed as the 'imagination', or humankind's reflection upon itself; 'character', formed by the various necessities associated with living in the world, and 'feeling' which is born out of human emotions (Ricoeur 1965). These characteristics form the tension of free will, of the means to creativity and freedom, but also locate the inherent potential for evil within humanity. Creativity and conflict determine the function of humanity's constitution; the means of its existence. They form the basis of the human being's restlessness – at once creative and driven by the insatiability of desires but, at the same time, open to a negativity that must be passed through in order to be affirmed. The fragility of the human being gives rise to the fallibility that creates the capacity for evil in the world. It is finally, at this point, that Ricoeur is able to make the connection with myths and symbols. Fallibility is acknowledged as the state of being 'fallen' through the 'avowal' of this capacity for evil (Ricoeur 1965: 219).

Ricoeur's study, *The Symbolism of Evil*, represents this task of identifying and categorising the symbols that constitute such an acknowledgement. Ricoeur then adopts a religious strategy, what he terms a 'phenomenology of "Confession"' (Ricoeur 1967: 3). By adopting the notion of confession, he is building on the aspect of avowal that distinguishes an intellectual conscience from innate bodily drives. As Simms suggests, in Ricoeur's thesis:

‘evil does not become evil from a phenomenological point of view [...] until at least the possibility of confessing it arises to consciousness. To put it the other way around, the possibility of confession is already contained within an evil deed. This being so, evil is known through symbols, since the symbols provide the material out of which the confession is to be constructed’ (Simms 2003: 21).

In his continually schematic unfolding, Ricoeur identifies a further triumvirate to qualify these symbols: defilement, sin and guilt.

Defilement – which Ricoeur uses interchangeably with the word ‘stain’ – has a primordial quality, more originary than sin. It has, he claims, been sublimated to the extent that it should be understood less as an uncleanness than as a symbolic dread of impurity or contamination. Thus sublimated, it is essentially an ‘ethical dread’ (Ricoeur 1967: 35). Such is Ricoeur’s claim that ‘Dread of the impure and rites of purification are in the background of all our feelings and all our behaviour relating to fault’ (Ricoeur 1967: 25). Defilement refers to the inexplicable, the ineffable. It exposes the involuntary and the astonishing: ‘Why are we astonished? Because we do not find in these actions or events any point where we might insert a judgement of personal imputation, or even simply human imputation; we have to transport ourselves into a consciousness for which impurity is measured not by imputation to a responsible agent but to the objective violation of an interdict’ (Ricoeur 1967: 27). Defilement retains a trace of an archaic or cosmological inference, of the happenings of the world above and beyond the intentions of individual agents. Much of its perceived evil takes the form of misfortune, suffering, sickness, and death. ‘Hence, the division between the pure and the impure ignores any distinction between the physical and the ethical and follows a distribution of the sacred and the profane which has become irrational for us’ (Ricoeur 1967: 27).

As an objective event, this defilement is something that ‘infects by contact’ leading to a subjective response that ‘is of the order of Dread’ (Ricoeur 1967: 27-28). However, a key shift in the presentation of dread is the link Ricoeur makes to the ‘primordial connection of vengeance with defilement’ (Ricoeur 1967: 28). This is posited as the oldest human memory and one that distinguishes an ‘ethical dread’ from a basic ‘physical fear’ (Ricoeur 1967: 28). Ethical dread inscribes evil within the realm of suffering. Physical suffering is provided with an ethical rationale in the mode of anxiety.

The awakening of an anxiety, in particular relating to vengeance or punishment leads to sin. Once again, Ricoeur's configuration is determined by a 'theistic' perspective founded on the moral authority of a transcendent idea or entity (Ricoeur 1967: 51). Sin comes about once a society has developed a concept of God and at this primordial stage can equally apply to monotheistic or polytheistic representations. As Ricoeur puts it, 'a first conceptualization of sin radically different from that of defilement is outlined on the symbolic level: missing the mark, deviation, rebellion, straying from the path do not so much signify a harmful substance as a violated relation' (Ricoeur 1967: 74). Ricoeur's breakdown of the types and terms of this violation is admirably meticulous and he stresses the need to avoid overly simplifying it to an arbitrary moral law or legislative and judicial power, that is, or is not, adhered to (Ricoeur 1967: 55). As an ethical injunction, he suggests that it should rather be seen as 'this infinite demand that creates an unfathomable distance and distress between God and man' (Ricoeur 1967: 55). Distance and distress underpin the plea for justice that accompanies the suffering and trials of defilement. In the face of defilement, such as the suffering of disasters, there is no apparent means of redress. A resort to ritual follows as an attempt to pre-empt such disasters. In moving away from a human relation to the external world, via ritual, to one that begins to recognise the self-questioning of humankind, the question of the absence or silence of the Gods emerges. The key moment in the development of sin Ricoeur locates in the Hebrew Covenant (Ricoeur 1967: 50). 'It is in a preliminary dimension of encounter and dialogue that there can appear such a thing as the absence and the silence of God, corresponding to the vain and hollow existence of man' (Ricoeur 1967: 50). The establishment of a covenant produces sin as its violation. The process of shifting meaning that Ricoeur attempts to recover is not a change of symbols but a change in the perception of symbols that reveals a movement from objectivity to subjectivity: 'in rising from the consciousness of defilement to the consciousness of sin, fear and anguish did not disappear; rather, they changed their quality. It is this new quality of anguish that constitutes what we call the "subjective" pole of the consciousness of sin' (Ricoeur 1967: 63).

This movement has an effect on the symbolism of sin. Where the symbolism of defilement was a contamination or infection, a contact with an external, representational 'something' – hence the sense of 'stain' – the symbols of sin shift to those of the rupture of a relation. Nevertheless, Ricoeur argues, the symbolism of sin retains an element of the 'something' of an external 'reality' – a 'power that lays hold of man' (Ricoeur 1967: 70). This power takes on the space of a certain

‘nothingness’ – an ontological ground or foundation that is the loss of the bond. Redemption, therefore, becomes integral to sin as the restitution of a lack – ‘the symbolism itself is not complete unless it is considered retrospectively from the point of view of the faith in redemption’ (Ricoeur 1967: 71). Moreover, this symbolic transition and the integral role of redemption alters the perspective from one that is spatial – a defilement in the here and now that demands to be rectified to return the here and now – to a temporal movement: ‘the symbol passes over from space to time; the “way” is the spatial projection of a movement that is the evolution of a destiny’ (Ricoeur 1967: 74).

Sin remains partially external or objective, ‘it is at once primordially personal and communal’ (Ricoeur 1967: 83). Where defilement takes place through the intervention of some kind of external body or force, sin is a shared, communal and public symbolisation of the fallibility of humankind. This leaves the third aspect of Ricoeur’s overall configuration, that of guilt, which moves the communal to the fully subjective or personal. Guilt is the projection of the recognition of a sin, an anticipation of the chastisement that is internalised and therefore weighs on the consciousness (Ricoeur 1967: 35). This is what leads to the most radical overhaul of the notion of evil for Ricoeur, the movement from the experience of evil as a defilement, an external, real effect, to an anxiety within the use of liberty and freedom and the simultaneous consciousness of this condition (Ricoeur 1967: 102). Guilt underpins Ricoeur’s sense of what is truly confessional. As Karl Simms neatly paraphrases it: ‘in defilement I accuse another, in sin I am accused, but in guilt I accuse myself’ (Simms 2003, 23). Guilt marks the shift from an all-encompassing ‘sin’ for which humanity is guilty before God to a notion of the degree of evil or sin in relation to other people: from the religious to the ethical. Simms stresses an important point regarding the role of symbolism. Having established a route away from the religious to the ethical, it may seem as if Ricoeur is finally overcoming the necessity of God. However, since guilt can only be arrived at through the two preceding stages of defilement and sin, the question of God remains as a presence within the concept of guilt. There will always be ‘recourse to the prior symbolism’ (Ricoeur 1967: 152).

Finally, having traced a movement from defilement through sin to guilt – or from the external forces of ‘evil’ to the subjective consciousness of its relation to the will – Ricoeur sets out the terms of the ‘myths’ that underpin and establish all effective symbols which Simms latterly distils into four key myths: ‘the myth of the creation of the world’ or the most naïve forms of

myth that aim to say something of the origins of the world, the evil or chaos that is its primordial disorder, and that must be put right to return order to the world. This is followed by the myth of 'the "tragic" vision of existence'. Here the Greek model is paramount with the spectacle of a hero blinded by the excess of ambition and punished by the gods. Ricoeur emphasises the theatrical spectacle of the drama that is watched rather than the story that is recounted. The third myth is that of the fall – the 'Adamic myth' – that presents the anthropological relation. The myth of origin, that of evil, is relocated within the human and becomes 'radical' through being brought into the world by the sinner. This last aspect introduces into the myth that which is absent from the former two: the aspect of 'penitence'. This is the retention of something that remains absolutely forbidden. Humankind is free to decide but cannot be the absolute arbiter of that freedom. Humanity is free but not autonomous. The fourth type of myth is that of 'the exiled soul' – for which the myth of Orpheus stands supreme. This myth confers the recognition of combination and separation of the body and the soul. It configures an eschatological force and a movement towards death – or the death of the body that retains the life, or continuation, of the soul (Simms 2003: 24-26).

Concluding this process of accounting for myths, Ricoeur then reconsiders them in respect of modernity. He acknowledges that in modernity we are living in a 'post-mythological age' that is speculative and sceptical of clearly defined foundations (Ricoeur 1967: 306). Nevertheless, Ricoeur claims, myths and the symbols that contain their hidden intentions cannot be easily abandoned or ignored. He doubts the possibility of being able simply to view all such myths as pure and is indifferent to the probability of spectators rationally demythifying each in turn. The resistance of each of the myths, by varying degrees, remains in their constant allegorisation and reification in various cultural forms. Ricoeur proclaims the Adamic myth to be the exemplar by virtue of its residual status within the structure of Christianity that retains a dominant – if doctrinally diminishing – role in Western cultural life. Moreover, it not only contains the other myths, it also calls upon interpretation and, as such, continues to give rise to new appropriations and reinterpretations.

In a later essay, 'The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: I', Ricoeur sets about separating the symbols from the myths to a further degree. The symbol, claims Ricoeur, does not posit a meaning; rather it gives rise to thought, 'something to think about' (Ricoeur 2004: 285). He breaks the symbols down into primary and mythical categories: 'the

symbol of evil is constituted by starting from something which has a first-level meaning and is borrowed from the experience of nature – of contact, of man’s orientation in space’ (Ricoeur 2004: 287). This is the primary symbol. ‘Mythical symbols are more articulated; they leave room for the dimension of narrative, with its fabled characters, places, and times, and tell of the Beginning and End of experience of which the primary symbols are the avowal’ (Ricoeur 2004: 287). It is here that Ricoeur most closely suggests the problem of symbols and myths that Jean-Luc Nancy contests – and, it is the claim here, that the films of Tarr, Seidl, Muratova, Andersson, etc., equally problematise within the area of cinema. Ricoeur writes in this essay:

in distinction from technical signs, which are perfectly transparent and say only what they mean by positing the signified, symbolic signs are opaque: the first, literal, patent meaning analogically intends *a second meaning which is not given otherwise than in the first*. This opaqueness is the symbol’s very profundity, an inexhaustible depth (Ricoeur 2004: 287).

In relation to the films outlined in the introduction to this thesis, it is apparent that they each contain certain symbols that can be located within Ricoeur’s schematic. In particular they can be broken down by their location of the central categories of defilement, sin and guilt. *Flanders*, for example, can be viewed from the point of view of the ‘stain’ or defilement of war, both as a spectre on the history of the film’s landscape and in the genealogy of war as the ‘stain’ of human conflict. In a certain way too, *The Asthenic Syndrome*, *Palms* and *Russian Ark* all suggest a relation to defilement or stain as the condition of chaos and disintegration visited by the collapse of communism. Each of these films expresses the primary symbolic constituents of obscurity, blindness, waywardness, sickness and pollution. *The Asthenic Syndrome* and *Palms*, made in the late 1980s and early 1990s respectively, react more immediately and intuitively to the images of contradiction and disintegration in evidence, without recourse to either the mythic structures of disorder and order that narrative paradigms provide. Their immediacy does not provide them with the retrospective privilege to single out causes or initiating factors. *Russian Ark*, made after the immediate events, nevertheless, reconfigures the Soviet century (the ‘wasted twentieth century’ described in the narration) as a defilement of the order of culture.

Sátántangó, *Songs from the Second Floor* and *Werckmeister Harmonies*, however, are inclined towards the primary symbols of ‘sin’. Both *Sátántangó* and *Songs from the Second Floor* present tensions between social constructs and forms of idolatry. *Sátántangó* combines the figure of a ‘false messiah’ and the hopes and reassurances that the communal group misguidedly place in the returning, and imaginatively ‘resurrected’, figure of Irimaís who, the film also reveals, is driven by vengeful motives. *Songs from the Second Floor* depicts a society’s recourse to a variety of forms of idolatry and ritual under the conditions of disintegration that occur, ranging from self-flagellation and crystal-ball gazing to the sacrifice of a child. *Werckmeister Harmonies* retains several symbols, carrying over the ‘stain’ of pollution and destruction visited inexplicably by the arrival of the circus that is also driven by the seemingly vengeful and mysterious figure of the ‘Prince’ – seen only as the visual ‘stain’ of a shadow thrown onto a wall. Furthermore, it opens up the structure of the human and nonhuman through the mystery of the contagion of mob violence that sweeps the town and the dark side of order’s restitution by martial law. Each film presents the symbols of a mysterious power that has been turned away from, and at the same time, refuses a fully determined synthesis upon which order can be regained.

Ulrich Seidl’s *Dog Days* and *Import Export*, along with Roy Andersson’s *You the Living*, present more recognisable propositions of guilt within the suffering and actions of various protagonists. *Dog Days* depicts the guilt and suffering of loss, violent abuse, and loneliness across a wide-ranging group of characters. *Import Export*, focusing on two principle characters, retains the guilt of a mother leaving her child to travel as an economic migrant and a young man, in debt, who seeks to overcome the guilt of his physical and social emasculation. Both stories are further framed within a structure that raises questions of the status of human lives in the midst of modern economic determinism. *You the Living* frames its multiple vignettes within an overarching guilt at the violence humanity is capable of bestowing upon itself. This ranges from the incidental reference to Sweden’s wartime collaboration with the Nazis (a slight but resonant fixture in Andersson’s films from the short, *World of Glory* [1994], through *Songs from the Second Floor* to *You the Living*) and the overarching ‘dream’ of the aerial bombing of a city.

As suggested in the introduction, these examples are only some of the variety of symbols that fluctuate throughout the films, each of them acting as something like Ricoeur’s primary symbols – obscure, opaque, excessive, inexhaustible points of reference – that are all crucially

refused the synthesis or paradigmatic reconciliation of fully developed myths or rational modes of narrative or psychological interpretation. They are, so-to-speak, ‘myths interrupted’.

Jean-Luc Nancy uses the term ‘myth interrupted’ in an essay of that title published in *The Inoperative Community* (1986). There he sets out to explore myth and its foundational figures within the structure of community and the political. The question of a being-in-common and a human experience derived from the community of a shared finitude has driven much of Nancy’s work that has evolved (since the late 1960s and early 1970s) from philosophical critique, through politics and theology to aesthetics. A key theme in Nancy’s overall philosophical perspective is that of fragmentation and an anti-foundationalism (see James 2006). In this mid-period essay, Nancy presents an hiatus within the founding principles and effects of myth.

Similarly to Ricoeur, Nancy eschews the formula for myth (or ‘mythology’) that attends to fables, epic sagas or heroic narratives and addresses myth as those symbols and traditions which communities appeal to as a means to found shared existence or perpetuate existence as an intimate sharing of an identity or ‘essence’. Myth is a language or discourse in which a community recognises and shares principles, foundational and structuring relations and interpretations. Ian James outlines this formula in terms of the character of ‘sense’ that underwrites Nancy’s philosophical project – where ‘sense’ ‘is untied from an exclusive belonging to a symbolic order or relation of signifier to signified; [existing] both as an outer limit and as an excess of signification per se, becoming “the element in which signification, interpretations and representations *can occur*”’ (James 2006: 9). As such, myth refers to ‘the manner in which sense, as the shared stuff of finite existence, is organized into a signifying discourse or narrative, a series of figures or fictions upon which specific communal formations and practices are based’ (James 2006: 196).

Therefore, where Ricoeur sees symbol and myth as providing the grounds for ritual actions and shared understanding, Nancy views them as the ‘limit situations’ around which alternating meanings, significations, or representations conflict with each other. As James notes, Nancy argues that it is not possible to appeal to the existence of any shared concepts without accounting for the mutual implications of the various myths that underpin it (James 2006: 197). However, one should not be reduced to the other or vice versa: that is, it does not automatically follow that myths are the cause of political or historical events or that historical or political events can be reduced to a defining myth. ‘Rather it implies that a fundamental articulation of sense (existence) and the formalizing of that sense into the signifying discourses of myth (the

communication of an “in-common”) gives an overall context of sense and meaning which would underpin historical causality (and agency) per se’ (James 2006: 197).

Where Ricoeur consigns existence to a ‘mystery’ and thereafter attempts to recover the meaning of moral, ethical and religious symbolism, Nancy attempts to approach the mystery of existence head-on. Rather than seeing myth in the traditional sense of something like a timeless founding principle for the human condition and the base of its shared identity, he insists, instead, on a ‘nonidentity’ that (recast from Heidegger’s *Mitsein*, or ‘being-with’), is not and has never been something foundational. Through phases of history, and particularly through modernity, the metaphysical claims of shared mythology have been lost, ruptured or dispersed. The community of shared experience, then, is always ahead of us, as something that happens to us, as ‘question, waiting, event, imperative’ (Nancy 1991: 11). There has never been a totalising form of essence, identity or sharing. Rupture and dispersal, or the separation of the various ‘in-common’ entities within community, are exposed at their limits or borders. Christopher Fynsk writes, in the introduction to *The Inoperative Community*: ‘Community is presuppositionless: this is why it is haunted by such ambiguous ideas as foundation and sovereignty, which are at once ideas of what would be completely suppositionless and ideas of what would always be presupposed. But community cannot be presupposed. It is only exposed’ (in Nancy 1991: xxxix).

Nancy, then, rejects all traditional meanings ascribed to shared existence (or community) to, instead, claim a community based on a lack of identity or totality: It is this lack that ‘is constitutive of “community” itself’ (Nancy 1991: 12) since ‘community’ is not something foundational that has been lost but something that ‘happens to us’, that is immanent and imminent (Nancy 1991: 11). In this respect, Nancy claims community is not a concept that has been ‘lost’. Rather, it is always evolving and shifting and, following Blanchot, is as much an ‘unworking’. It is no longer a matter of production and completion but one of encounters with ‘interruption, fragmentation, suspension’ (Nancy 1991: 31). He writes:

Community is made of the interruption of singularities, or of the suspension that singular beings *are*. Community is not the work of singular beings, nor can it claim them as its work, just as communication is not a work or even an operation of singular beings, for community is simply their being – their being suspended upon its limit (Nancy 1991: 31).

It is such a formula for suspense in communication and community, its incompleteness and its limits, that the films of Tarr, Andersson, Muratova, etc., enact as an aesthetic and narrative process. They are marked by the persistent theme of 'waiting', of anticipation without completion, that ties the events of the film's content to the shared spectatorial experience.

Where Ricoeur appeals to myth to recover the foundations of a shared community and an identity based on particular understanding, Nancy finds the failures of community and identity, by contrast, to interrupt the total realisation of myths within history. As James remarks, 'the insufficiency of myths and founding narratives to properly account for existence in all its refractory, ungraspable, singular plurality is what reveals the finitude of human community' (James 2006: 198). For Nancy, 'shared finitude' forms the perpetual unravelling of community in the constant existential-temporal movement towards death of each and every one of us; it is the movement of history. James adds, 'The interruption of myth in this context would be its exposure to the plurality of finite sense for which it cannot account, and thus its exposure to new forms of sense or meaning.' (James 2006: 199). As such, dialectical or teleological processes are essentially flawed since they must perpetually and persistently succumb to interruption from the excess or suspension of 'sense'.

Contrary to Ricoeur's attempts to bind meaning and its recovery to the development of symbols via an hermeneutics that takes the world to be textual and the interpretation of its underlying symbols to hold the key to its mysteries, Nancy asserts the interruption of symbols as the focus of attention. Crucially however, Nancy does not go on to proclaim the irrelevance or obsolescence of symbols (in the search for an abstract or axiomatic formula for meaning, as does, for example, Alain Badiou). Rather, Nancy attempts to locate a formula for 'sense' – or a non-foundational 'ontology' of existence not located in a subject – in the collision or 'limit situation' of the dominant structures of meaning and the contingent, plural and irreducible excesses of historical events. Therefore, aesthetics plays a crucial part in the exposure of 'sense'. Ian James writes:

In [Nancy's] thinking of unworked community there is no experience of mythic foundation without experience itself, as shared finitude, countering or interrupting myth. For Nancy, the key issue of praxis within this context relates to the means by which the interruption of myth and with this the experience of finite being-in-common can be

affirmed. In *La Communauté désœuvrée* this experience of interruption finds its most important affirmation in the practice of writing called 'literature' (James 2006: 199).

In subsequent publications, what Nancy says of literature has been extended to account more widely for aesthetics and the artwork – a generality including the cinema. This elevation of 'literature' to a principle place in the configuration of community and politics – and, by extension, 'sense' – is consistent with Nancy's view of the artwork as affirming 'a sharing of sense which is irreducible to any fixed identity or meaning' (James 2006: 200). Most significantly for Nancy, the idea of literature enables what he terms a 'literary communism' or an articulation of shared being beyond any figure of identity; an opening onto 'sense' where it has the 'quality of being, its nature and its structure are sharing' (Nancy 1991: 64). For Nancy, the literature that achieves this disclosure, or opening (as opposed to those forms of literature that reiterate and reinforce traditions) points to a specific manner of being-in-the-world that is 'nothing but communication itself, the passage from one to another, the sharing of one by the other' (Nancy 1991: 65). It is this notion of being-in-the-world and addressing the world through the artwork that returns most strongly in Nancy's reflections on the cinema as a 'way of looking', a 'regard for the world and its truth' (Nancy 2001: 13-14).

In summary then, this chapter claims that the films outlined in this thesis each present various versions of the symbols and myths that can be associated with defilement, sin and guilt – the three core elements in Paul Ricoeur's configuration of the human condition as one of fallibility and contradiction. However, these films proceed to interrupt these symbols, preventing them from fully achieving their synthesis in traditional terms. What is revealed through these films is the excess and suspension of traditional or recoverable meanings, that is, a human experience of shared recognition without recourse to particular values or identities. Following Jean-Luc Nancy, this aesthetic formula reflects experience, or 'sense', through the relation of recognisable symbols cut adrift from the foundational or transcendent structures that give them particular meanings.

Central to the cinematic terms of this formula enacted by the 'post-historical' films under discussion it is the overriding action of suspense that opens such a space of exposure. From the waiting for a 'new language' and the birth of the narrator's son in *Palms* to the suspension of the cut in *Russian Ark*; from the waiting for the 'false messiahs' or the coming catastrophes in *Sátántangó*, *Songs from the Second Floor* and *Werckmeister Harmonies*, to the suspension of judgement

(which is also suspense in the cinematic sense of awaiting narrative conclusion) in *Elephant*, *Last Days*, *Dog Days* or *Import Export*, these films pose the problem of identifying a meaning in the traditional ‘sense’ of a confirmed identification or a revealed signification. Instead they offer up their images to speculation and a tension as we wait for a revelation they does not arrive; the condition that Nancy describes as ‘sense’, as that which is ‘*suspended over this sense that has already touched us*’ (Nancy 1997: 11, original in italics). Therefore, there is no mystery (as something to be revealed) only a ‘sense’ derived from ever modifying experience:

The experience in question is not a mystical experience. Rather, no doubt it is the experience of this, that there is no experience of sense if ‘experience’ is supposed to imply the appropriation of a signification – but that there is *nothing other* than experience of sense (and this is the world) if ‘experience’ says that sense precedes all appropriation or succeeds on and exceeds it (Nancy 1997: 11).

Likewise, implying no ‘mystery’, only a ‘sense’, these films distinguish themselves from the symbolic formulae of Ricoeur. Guilt is a form of suspense and confession is its release, however, these films precisely play on this relation to present a contradiction that is the limit of both confession’s evidence and its withdrawal. They express the guilt in suspense whilst refusing either the atonement or judgement of confession, opening onto a shared experience between film and spectator of an evidence or exposure of ‘sense’.

In the next chapter I aim to elaborate Nancy’s assertion of an ‘ethos’ or ‘habitus’ in relation to this ‘sense’ which is also a relation to the ‘world’. Nancy develops this relation from the consequence of the exhaustion of metaphysics attributed to the post-historical era. At the same time, then, this serves to emphasise the historical conditions in which these films emerged and therefore, presents a provocative parallel between this period’s conceptual formula and the films’ corresponding aesthetic relevance.

CHAPTER 2

The ‘Post-Historical’ Context: Redemption’s Hiatus

The previous chapter identified a series of symbols and myths developed by Paul Ricoeur that sets out a framework for an understanding of defilement, sin and guilt that underpin the condition of human fallibility; a series of symbols with developed myths that can be readily identified as elements within the ‘post-historical’ films of Muratova, Tarr, etc. However, Ricoeur’s attempt to recover meaning, derived from the development of symbols, as it remains within an essentially Christian perspective (*why* is there evil in the world?), was challenged by Jean-Luc Nancy’s more recent formulation of the ‘interruption of myth’. Rather than attempting to evaluate according to tradition the moral and ethical terms of the mystery of ‘evil’ – the signs of its immoral tendencies and violent, antagonistic effects – as does Ricoeur, Nancy argues that the very limit situation of symbols, myths and meanings, their perpetual incompleteness, opens up a space for the recognition of experience, or ‘sense’. This, in itself, presents a reorientation of aesthetic practice away from the mythologising of meaning in traditional imagery and narrative and the deliberate de-mythologising of meaning in modernist art and its anti-narrative and self-reflexive strategies, to a presentation of the ‘sense’ of experience as it simultaneously reveals and withdraws meaning or signification – a process that Nancy calls ‘transimmanence’ (Nancy 1997: 55).

At the heart of Nancy’s approach is the re-configuration of ‘ontology’ as a movement of ‘shared finitude’ that is not beholden to any particular foundation, identity or sovereignty. Ontology emerges from the constant movement of ‘sense’ as it is exposed at the limits of signification and, therefore, presents not so much the creation of new meanings as the space in which new meanings *can occur*. As Douglas Morrey notes, Nancy repeatedly plays on the double meaning, in French, of ‘sense’ (*le sens*) as both ‘perceptual senses and their objects’ and ‘meaning and signification’ (Morrey 2008: 10). This double meaning is crucial to the artwork, which is then repositioned not as a representation of particular meanings new or reified, but as fragments of the world (of ‘sense’) presented back to the world. It is, then, the presentation of the negative, contradictory, antagonistic, and violent aspects of sense that forms the overarching characteristic of the ‘post-historical’ films set out in this thesis, as here we recall Nancy’s claim that ‘it is in our

distress that we know our coexistence' (in Lingis 1997:197). There remains the question of this 'post-historical' context and its relevance to the films. This question brings to light the relation between their aesthetic and conceptual strategies and those of contemporary theory at large. It also draws attention to the parallels between cinematic practice and cultural theory operating within, and in response to, the same kinds of social, political and historical conditions.

For Nancy, the formula for 'shared finitude' reconfigures the concept of community as the locus of meanings and their constant interruption and reinvention. Community describes a being-in-common which is fluid and multiple: there are many communities overlapping, sharing and conflicting with each other, whilst a community (or communion) through artworks can open the *possibility* of shared experience that is not dependent on a foundation or identity. Artworks function as the medium through which traditions are disrupted – deliberately or otherwise. In *The Inoperative Community* Nancy writes:

Community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called 'unworking,' referring to that which, before or beyond work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension (Nancy 1991: 31).

Artworks function as fragments of the world and as openings and exposures of sense through their capacity to present an experience that can be shared. Nancy develops this notion of community in direct response to the historical conditions of a post-Heideggerian 'exhaustion of metaphysics' and as a response to Jean-Paul Sartre's contention that 'communism was the "unsurpassable horizon of our time"' (in Nancy 1991: 1) – it is an address specifically aimed at the legacy of Marxism, communism and the demand for a narrative of collective or mass emancipation at the heart of modernity. Nancy's 'ontological' emphasis – that leads to an aesthetic address – directly anticipates and responds to the conditions of 'post-history' that are identified with the 'end' of foundational and teleological schemes for progress (not only by Fukuyama but also thinkers such as Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard). At the same time, it corresponds to the expansion of liberal capitalism, and the distillation of a social body that is atomised through the economic and technological functions of capitalism, leading to the dominant metaphysics of the individual subject. Nancy deliberately seeks to move the focus away from nostalgic contemplation of a lost

horizon of communism to question the configuration of communism or community as a model. Community (which includes artworks) comprises of an always already present experience of 'singular-plurality'. This configuration of the specific and the relational then determines his ontology of 'sense'. This is not a theory of concepts reducible to an axiomatic judgement but rather, as Ian James puts it, 'an ethos and a praxis' that 'demands attention to [...] the being of entities and events as well as an openness to the inexhaustibility and open-endedness of meaning and signification' (James 2006: 112). Thus avoiding any foundational structure or regulating principle for community (or communism *as* community), it emphasises the more immediate sense of 'communion' as receiving: an opening of the self to what is 'beyond sense and into its unworking' (Nancy 2008c: 9) – a thread Nancy has continued when exploring the legacy of the parable, a point to be revisited later.

In a recent work, *The Creation of the World or Globalisation*, Nancy returns to this 'lost horizon' of community, filtering it through the English/French distinction between the terms 'globalisation' and 'mondialisation'. The first, particular to the English language and with its undercurrent of what Heidegger would call 'productionist metaphysics' – the materialistic basis of Western life and thought (in Clark 2002: 29) – implies a mastery of the world without remainder; the formulation of a system of techno-economic control that is totalising. The second, uniquely French term, is interpreted as 'world-forming', retaining horizons as interruptions and suspensions of 'sense' (Nancy 2007: 36). In this etymology, 'globalisation' is replete with the metaphysical and eschatological formula of its Western, Christian orientation (Nancy 2007: 33-37). Such an orientation more widely develops what Nancy set out in an essay 'The Deconstruction of Christianity' (in Nancy 2008b) in which he adopts and expands links between a Christian world-view as an integral part of capitalism initiated by Max Weber (Weber 2004) and developed by Marcel Gauchet (Gauchet 1997). For Nancy, 'mondialisation' proposes a thinking of community that retains the horizons and thresholds of the persistent and shared struggle for justice within itself. Therefore it stands in opposition to the economical and technological uniformity of a perceived 'globalisation' that subjects the community of justice to the preconceived terms of its dominant ideology.

Ian James has pointed out that in *The Creation of the World*, Nancy reinforces his position from which ontology and the ethics of decision are co-existent and co-originary and the very terms of 'creation' are relieved of any foundationalist or determining factors – key symbols or founding

myths – and the constant movement of creation is stressed. This reiterates the engagement with community and being-in-common, or ‘being-in-the-world’, that revokes the theological or transcendent overtones of creation to envisage a materialist form of ‘sense’ that expresses the contingency of creation evolving and passing through historical situations (James 2006: 234). Once again, symbols and myths are not dispensed with but reoriented as the horizons or limit situations of beginnings and ends. This places the Western, Christian paradigm and its eschatological and redemptive impetus at the centre of both metaphysics and representation and emphasises its mythology *as* the problem of beginnings and ends, which in turn serves to reveal ‘sense’.

The conception of redemption is reiterated in countless ways within teleological frameworks of secular politics, not least in their placing of community – the ‘masses’ or the ‘people’, their emancipation or their ordering – as central to form. They constantly derive foundations and seek totalising goals. Such formulae remain consistent in the narratives of order and disorder, catastrophe and survival, crime and justice, suffering and redemption throughout the history of cinema. Within this history the cinema has been elaborated upon in relation to the concept of the ‘masses’: as a vehicle for mass communication and a community of images and myths, of mass consumption and mass spectacle. From the classical Hollywood appeal to family, class, property and a Christian world-view identified by Bordwell *et al.* (Bordwell 1985), to the revolutionary rhetoric of Soviet montage or 1960s modernism, mass audiences have been the target of both conservative and emancipatory narratives and movements within film theory attentive to audience reception.

What can be drawn from Nancy’s perspective is a thinking of the cinema that is less a medium of myths and collective images, signs and meanings, or shared ‘beliefs’ through established traditions, than it is acts of disclosure responding to the world as present and singular. It calls upon something like an act of ‘faith’, which is ‘a matter of hearing: of hearing our own ear listening, of seeing our own eye looking, even at that which opens it and at that which is eclipsed in this opening’ (Nancy 2008c: 10). Where philosophy after Heidegger is conditioned by a confrontation with its own termination, no longer grounded on any teleology or fundamental schema, so it becomes, as Christopher Fynsk identifies, a matter of ‘*repeating* the movements by which philosophy exhausted its possibilities’, where this is a task of repetition that cannot be completed (in Nancy 1991: vii, original in italics). Films like *The Asthenic Syndrome*, *Sátántangó* or

Songs from the Second Floor do not resort to a modernist formula of abstraction or meaninglessness, something like a negative dialectic of aesthetics put forward by Adorno (Lechte 1994, 179) and realised most cinematically in the medium's early modern phase of the 1920s as Jacques Rancière has observed (Rancière 2006). These films, rather, maintain cinema's predominantly realist and mythic orientations, but seek to resist, contest and disrupt those myths by suspending the predetermination of their symbols. They do not conclude that the era of their production is absurd or meaningless. Rather, they seek to open a space for insistence on the insufficiency of traditional signs, motifs, symbols and their narratives in the face of an hiatus in the ideological terms of beginning and end. In short, in the sense that Nancy seeks to delineate the philosophical implications of the exhaustion of metaphysics, we might suggest such films, likewise, delineate the exhaustion of the symbolic and mythic structures of narrative cinema.

This perspective points towards the 'post-historical' in a particular way. From the collapse of foundational and teleological discourses and the dissolution of modernity into postmodernity, the 'evental' aspect of history comes to the fore. With it comes realignment away from conceptual programmes, generic paradigms and dramatic archetypes and towards the provenance of an initial experience. In this sense, the films of Muratova, Tarr, Seidl, Van Sant, etc., are conditioned by their immediate historical relation (the collapse of the Communist State, the influx of cross border migration, or the occurrence of a specific high school shooting) and yet, they do not specify these events, elevate them to paradigmatic significance, or attempt to account for them through historical or generic narrative. Instead, they turn on the intimate conditions of a given moment, a time or place, and the limits and aporetics of human actions and responsibilities. In short, from the immediacy of the traumatic conditions or events to which they respond, they refuse any attempt at 'mastery'. Rather, they initiate or recreate their responses from the perspective of an historical hiatus. Films such as *Russian Ark* and *Flanders* that directly challenge an historical legacy ultimately arrest forward motion within suspension and repetition respectively. What is central to this 'post-historical' context, then, is less an apparent descent into nihilism or the loss of meanings attached to clearly defined political, ideological or narrative structures than the status of the artwork, the film, in the midst of this hiatus.

Doubtless the collapse of the political programme of Soviet Communism in 1989 provoked the declaration of many conceptual and ideological 'ends' to the twentieth century (Sim 1999). The persistence of apocalyptic scenarios, from the 'millennium bug' to environmental

catastrophe, and the rise of nationalism, religious fundamentalism and the heightened state of emergency declared by Western governments in the wake of the events of 11th September 2001, have forced an agenda of pervasive crisis and an acute anxiety, dread and foreboding towards violence and catastrophe on a spectacular scale within the past two decades. The Hollywood studios have responded with a reinvigoration of the spectacular via the resurgence of ‘B Movie’ narrative conservatism and state-of-the-art special effects, from the natural disaster of *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) to the rampaging monster of *Cloverfield* (2007). Meanwhile, the subject of domestic threat and sadistic violence, from the commercial trend for ‘home-invasion’ played as horror, and the sub-genre of ‘torture porn’ (see Newman 2006), through to Michael Haneke’s riposte with *Funny Games* (1998), we are reminded of Walter Benjamin’s famous dictum that human beings can experience their own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure (Benjamin 1999: 235). This restitution of archetypes, not least in the parodic form so characteristic of post-modernity, has led Alain Badiou, for one, to proclaim the present cinema to be dominated by a ‘neo-classicism’ (Badiou 2005: 93).

However, the disintegration, decay and violence that permeate the films argued for here display a marked resistance to the cinematically spectacular destruction configured within traditional redemptive structures. As noted in the introduction, their collective propensity towards delineating an ‘ontology’ of violence or decay is what marks them out. Moreover, their particular reference to themes of apocalypse, religious idolatry, Christology and resurrection necessarily calls into question, and even evokes the failure, of religious or theological systems of belief and their attendant moral structures. The transcendent basis for such moral valuation is seen to lose its meaning. This loss of meaning poses the question of nihilism in contemporary society. Simon Critchley identifies nihilism as ‘Nihilism is ‘this declaration of meaninglessness, a sense of indifference, directionlessness or, at its worst, despair that can flood into all areas of life’ (Critchley 2007: 2).

Critchley’s summary would seem readily applicable to the outlined films and to their host of characters apparently without direction, struggling against the circumstances into which they are thrown and acting, willed or unwilled, in antagonistic, violent or self-destructive ways. In reviews, *Songs from the Second Floor* is summarised as ‘a lugubrious *danse macabre* stifling hope at every step, [appearing] to drown in its own misery’ (Bracewell 2000: 37); *Dog Days* as adhering ‘dogmatically to the school of sado-miserabilism’ (Lim 2003); *Elephant*, in ‘providing no insight or

enlightenment' appears 'pointless at best and irresponsible at worst' (McCarthy 2003); military conflict in *Flanders* is described as 'lacking any specific mission or leader, [soldiers] fan out into the desert with blank, meaningless glares to commit a series of bungles and war crimes' (Lee 2007); *Sátántangó* is said to 'achieve a transporting nihilism that casts a heavy spell'; this 'seven-hour contemplation of boredom, decay and misery' (Maslin 1994); and *The Asthenic Syndrome* describes a world in which 'cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless' (Roberts 1999: 147).

Such reviews equally hint at the other, secular, side of nihilism – what Critchley calls, this time, a 'political disappointment': 'the realization that we inhabit a violently *unjust* world' (Critchley 2007: 3). This situation provokes the need for an ethics or some normative grounds for confronting that world. The present era – the 'post-modern' – has often been characterised as replacing ethics with aesthetics. Meaninglessness allows for a chic aesthetic radicalism that disguises a moral or political vacuum. Boggs and Pollard argue that:

What postmodern films share in common is an irreverence for authority and convention – a rebellious spirit, dystopic views of the future, cynical attitudes toward the family and romance, images of alienated sexuality, narrative structures deprecating the role of old-fashioned heroes, and perhaps above all, the sense of a world filled with chaos. These features are often combined with a romantic turn toward nostalgia, a longing for the past that encapsulates so much postmodern culture, along with a harshly critical, even nihilistic attitude toward politics. (Boggs 2003: ix)

The relative simplicity with which nihilism is attached to chaos, despair and destructive impetus invites the need to distinguish the films of Muratova, Tarr, etc., from the binary terms of meaning/meaninglessness that are locked into established modes of narrative and representation. It is from an outline of the terms of nihilism, and the means by which theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy (following Heidegger's response to Nietzsche and nihilism), that a more subtle account of these films can begin. In side-stepping the duality of meaning and meaninglessness aligned with traditional discourses to instead present the filmed image as a threshold of 'sense' and a contact with experience they point towards a means of resistance to

nihilism, allied with what Critchley calls the ‘philosophical task set by Nietzsche’ (Critchley 2007: 2).

Nietzsche’s famous assertion of the ‘death of God’ at the end of the nineteenth century contributed a profound scepticism, not only to the theological ‘truths’ of the Judeo-Christian tradition challenged at least since the Enlightenment, but also to the great idealist projects that had attempted to replace it. This scepticism developed from an historical relativism: if history demonstrates that there are and have been wildly differing accounts of the meaning of events and the ‘essence’ of human existence then there can only ever be *interpretations* of the world. Nietzsche called this condition ‘perspectivism’:

In so far as the word ‘knowledge’ has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it but countless meanings – ‘Perspectivism’. (Nietzsche 1968: 267)

There can be no ‘objective’ valuation of the world, no single perspective that is ‘true’, not for rational, idealist, positivist or scientific thought any more than for religious dogma. It is the realisation of the impossibility of any ‘truth’ – essentially those moral or ideological configurations of the world designed to grant humans value or redeem suffering – that creates an overpowering sense of meaninglessness.

The feeling of valuelessness was reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of ‘aim,’ the concept of ‘unity,’ or the concept of ‘truth.’ Existence has no end or goal; any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking: the character of existence is not ‘true,’ is *false* (Nietzsche 1968: 13).

The Christian perspective then becomes central to this critique since, in Nietzsche’s diagnosis, nihilism is rooted in its particular interpretation of the world: that is, the belief in a true world of divine grace in opposition to the false world of earthly becoming. As Simon Critchley notes in an earlier study, ‘nihilism is not simply the negation of the Christian-Moral interpretation of the world, but is the *consequence* of that interpretation; that is to say, it is the consequence of moral

valuation' (Critchley 1997: 8). The 'death of God' reveals religious 'truths' to be nothing but psychological balms; therefore, the will for moral interpretation is shown to be nothing but the will to an untruth.

As soon as man finds out how that [true] world is fabricated solely from psychological needs, and how he has absolutely no right to it, the last form of nihilism comes into being: it includes disbelief in any metaphysical world and forbids itself any belief in a *true* world. Having reached this standpoint, one grants the reality of becoming as the *only* reality, forbids oneself every kind of clandestine access to afterworlds and false divinities – but *cannot endure this world though one does not want to deny it*. (Nietzsche 1968: 13, original italics)

How to endure the world, without denying it or deluding ourselves with ever more elaborate forms of meaning was the legacy of Nietzsche's argument, what Critchley calls the 'philosophical task' of 'how to *resist* nihilism' (Critchley 2007: 2). Nietzsche had warned of two particular attitudes to nihilism, those he called 'active' and 'passive'.

According to Critchley, 'active' nihilism, recognising the world to be meaningless, is characterised by the desire to destroy the present world and bring another into being: a resonant rhetoric for a range of utopian, politically radical and terrorist groups throughout history (Critchley 2007: 5). It desires an overturning of everyday life. Such an overturning might also be said to be the overburdened task ascribed to 'montage' within a history of cinematic practice and theory, an underlying theme in the following chapter.

'Passive' nihilism, which also recognises the world as meaningless, reacts through a withdrawal from any belief in progress or the perfectibility of human nature and the desire to transform conditions. Instead, it is inclined to refuse to face the brutality of reality and seeks a 'mystical stillness' for the self (Critchley 2007: 5). Nietzsche likened it to Buddhism (Nietzsche 1968: 18). The formal inclination within the films to adopt a contemplative, even 'transcendental' style (as defined by Paul Schrader, the subject of Chapter Four), without recourse to a prescriptive mode of response to the conditions described, may open them to the charge of a 'passive' nihilism. However, their forthright confrontation with the conditions of violence, antagonism and decay is far from a refusal of the 'reality' of a brutal world. Ultimately, then, it

will be the configuration of the terms of the 'real' – as 'sense' – that becomes the crux of their relation with redemption after Nancy.

All of the films demonstrate a recognisably realist world whose spatial and temporal relations are fully intact. There is a meaningful relation between people and objects, landscapes and architectures, events and their effects. What appears to fail to provide meaning are those assumptions based on a binary opposition of meaning and meaninglessness associated with an expectation of the articulation of traditional editing logic: of cause and effect or of psychological identification. The question of death and being towards death, hovers over the films and yet, amid the violence and catastrophe, there is an absence of death either as a withdrawal from life or as a revolutionary attempt at overhaul conditions. Certainly death presented as a romanticised form of closure, as it is so often fetishised in many post-war modernist films of the New Waves – in certain films by Jean-Luc Godard or Wim Wenders, for instance (see Russell, 1995) – is clearly suspended. Indeed, sickness and invalidity remains a more prominent thread than death throughout, as with the titular pathology of *The Asthenic Syndrome*, the institutionalisation of Kalle's son in *Songs from the Second Floor*, the decline of Valushka in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, the hysteria of Barbe in *Flanders*, for example. Such conditions speak less of a definable meaninglessness than a condition of sickness or wretchedness that demands a cure. The effects of such symptoms in the midst of failing social systems suggest the urgency of a critique of those very systems. Theodor Adorno's defence of Samuel Beckett against the charge of nihilism offers provocative implications. Beckett's plays 'in their aesthetic autonomy and their refusal of meaning (hence the superficial accusation of nihilism) function as determinate negations of contemporary society' (in Critchley 1997, 22).

In an earlier discussion of nihilism, Simon Critchley outlines a proposition developed from both Heidegger and Adorno and reminiscent of Nancy in which he calls for a delineation of the limits of nihilism. Against the founding of nihilism as a new ground – that of meaninglessness or nothingness – he stresses a threshold across which the terms of experience operate and conflict but still remain.

What will be at stake is a liminal experience, a deconstructive experience of the limit – deconstruction *as* an experience of the limit – that separates the inside from the outside of nihilism and which forbids us both the gesture of transgression and restoration. On such a

view, neither philosophy, nor art, nor politics alone can be relied upon to redeem the world, but the task of thinking consists in a historical confrontation with nihilism that does not give up on the demand that things might be otherwise (Critchley 1997: 12).

Heidegger had transformed Nietzsche's concept of nihilism into the history of Being: one that led to its oblivion. He understood Nietzsche's proposition that 'God is dead' as the 'acknowledgement that the supersensory no longer has any effective power', that is, God, standing for the metaphysical realm of ideas and ideals (Plato's 'true world'), can be demonstrably nothing more than a product of the sensory world – a fable. Nietzsche's attempt to overturn this 'Platonism' was inevitably entangled in its opposition and therefore remained, itself, metaphysics. As a result, the essence of nihilism, in Heidegger's diagnosis, lay in history, 'in the manner in which Being has fallen into nothing' (Critchley 1997: 15).

In response, Heidegger sought to move away from any attempt to 'cross the line' separating nihilism from its overcoming and, instead, to delineate it: to arrive at '[a] thinking of the essence of nihilism [that] will lead us into the thinking of Being as that unthought ground of all metaphysical thinking' (Critchley 1997: 15). Where the wilful attempt to overcome nihilism leads to a forgetting of Being, the delineation would attempt to question the metaphysical language of nihilism. Heidegger acknowledged the paradox of language – the language he must use – that it remained caught in propositional terms that result in the application of the striking through of those terms: the mediation of crossing out that Jacques Derrida later develops as the *sous rature* and the trace (Critchley 1997: 17). Critchley concludes that Heidegger's delineation offers a deconstructive experience, quoting Heidegger's own, cryptic expression: 'Thinking and poeticizing must in a certain way go back to where they have always already been and at the same time have still never built' (in Critchley 1997: 17). Jacques Derrida described the trace as testifying to a transcendental signified that is 'effaced while remaining legible' (in Critchley 1997: 17). Similarly, it is in this sense that, for example, Bruno Dumont's *Flanders* makes the legacy of conflict both present and absent in the landscape (Chapter Six) and Béla Tarr's *Werckmeister Harmonies* challenges the traditional metaphysical overcoming of the 'animal' within the 'human' (Chapter Nine).

Following from Heidegger, Critchley turns to Adorno and the closing passages of *Minima Moralia*, in which the latter poses the question of the possibility of redemption in a world that has

proved itself so desperately in need of 'hope'. The problem remains how to find a hope that is neither some Promethean overturning nor a reification of already failed tradition. The relationship between nihilism and redemption stems from the attempts to overcome nihilism. In that respect, he argues that the 'question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters' (in Critchley 1997: 19). What is important is the persistence of the demand. This is what Critchley calls Adorno's 'austere messianism' (Critchley 1997: 24). The demand is doubly important from the point of view of its impossibility more than its possibility. If a standpoint of salvation were possible it would have to be refused precisely because it could only present a false image of reconciliation. Acts of restitution only proclaim the restoration of the Christian-Moral construction of the world; acts of overcoming (the premise of the active nihilist) only produce new values that are corruptible by the kind of new orders that ultimately lead to fascism. In Adorno's account, the world has already shown itself to be 'indigent and distorted'. As such, 'to offer a picture of a reconciled world and peaceful world at this point in history would be to offer something that can simply be recuperated by the culture industry and reproduced as ideology' (Critchley 1997: 23). In deliberately denying and resisting the traditional structure and relation of redemption to event the possibility of hope remains in the presentation of experience and the refusal to allow it to be qualified. Critchley concludes:

[...] the demand that we view the world from the standpoint of how things might be otherwise, is not a question of an *Überwindung* [overcoming] of nihilism but of getting consciousness to wrest or extricate (*entwinden*) from nihilism what is lost sight of in the desire for overcoming (Critchley 1997:24).

This, he says, is Adorno's 'austere messianism' (Critchley 1997: 24), a term that immediately points towards Jacques Derrida's re-negotiation of the 'messianic' in his most explicit response to the end of European communism and the 'post-historical' debate, *Specters of Marx*.

If Adorno's 'messianism' was drawn from the refusal to allow the strategies of overcoming to dominate the conditions of suffering, need or oppression, Derrida's 'messianism' aims to articulate the form in which suffering, need and oppression makes itself present at the same time as it is rendered absent by the totalising forces of dominant culture. The 'messianic' defines the vigilance and readiness for action stripped of the programmatic prophecy of the term:

it is 'a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism' (Derrida 2006: 74). It is, in effect, the form of imminence, not its narrative. The messianic retains a diagnosis of a heightened present that cannot be said to have exorcised its ghosts, or laid to rest its past. In this way, the 'messianic' is a sense or affect within the broader compression of history (events) and ontology (Being). To express this diagnosis Derrida creates the term 'hauntology'.

Derrida chooses the moment when the legacy of Marx had been declared dead to re-awaken its 'ghost' or 'spirit' and to contemplate the form in which certain concepts and events can remain both absent and present, visible yet indefinite. The 'spectre' of Marx returns to reiterate Derrida's recurring theme of the *trace*, the assertion that all Western philosophy is based on the premise that what is most apparent to our conscious understanding, what is most immediate and obvious, hides an array of alternatives that are masked by discourse. However, the 'spectre' also provides a more imagistic and visionary formula for this concept, a 'showing' that expresses a more disturbing, more restless calling. It harks back to the evental as much, if not more, than the conceptual. It is no longer the doctrine of Marxism that lingers so much as the fragmentary instances of its motivation: 'never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and humanity' (Derrida 2006: 106).

In a further twist, Derrida asserts the potential for a redemptive force behind the spectre:

The specter is not only the carnal apparition of the spirit, its phenomenal body, its fallen and guilty body, it is also the impatient and nostalgic waiting for a redemption, namely, once again, for a spirit [...]. The ghost would be the deferred spirit, the promise or calculation of an expiation (Derrida 2006: 170).

Early on Derrida seeks to establish the distinction between 'spectre' and 'spirit': the former giving phenomenality to the latter, and the latter only producing effect through material form – voice/language, image/signs (Derrida 2006: 5). Therefore the 'spirit' exists prior to its first apparition, detached from his material or historical forms but – its redemptive aspect – not exhausted by them. The 'spectral', on the other hand, is a 'furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible'; distinct from the 'icon', 'idol' or 'simulacrum' because it does not simply appear before

us but ‘we feel ourselves being looked at by it’ (Derrida 2006: 6). It is not merely an accounting of past factual events, unresolved historical legacies, but an aestheticised, sensory re-presentation. Within this re-presentation, through the artwork – the film – the historical takes on a confessional tone – that of its suspense – and the insistence on ‘expiation’.

We may begin to see this aesthetic equivalent in the visible but conceptually or narratively illusive synthesis of images on the cinema screen. *Elephant* carries within it the unequivocal ghost of the Columbine High School shooting; *Last Days*, the ghost of Kurt Cobain. *Russian Ark* presents the double haunting, or palimpsest, of the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary history of Russia. *Flanders* carries the spectre of the trenches of World War One within the frosty landscapes of northern France. Roy Andersson’s films, from *World of Glory* to *You the Living*, each carry the ghost of Sweden’s wartime history within their *mise-en-scène*. Derrida’s ‘hauntology’ – the incomprehensible within the comprehensible – remains as the spectre of symbols and myths in an aesthetic strategy in parallel with Derrida’s own characterisation of a legacy of concepts within the terms of experience: a ‘hauntology’ in place of an ‘ontology’.

Derrida is resistant to his formula being seen as any kind of aesthetics (Derrida 1999: 248). However, Fredric Jameson entertains the possibility, seeing an aesthetic as an ‘historical form–problem’ (Jameson 1999: 34): one that resists the proposition of any new kind of philosophical system to instead operate at the limit point of procedures and the forming of concepts. Contrary to the insistence on a new or transformative proposition or the forming of a concept, the spectre interrupts the forming itself (Jameson 1999: 32). However, Jameson stresses the point that the conditions of hauntology – and its ghosts – should not be thought of in the same sense as those fully formed manifestations of literary ghosts or the haunting figures of fantasy or fiction – from the apparitions stalking the works of Shakespeare to their gothic counterparts, right up to the possessive demons of modern cinema. Those are vengeful ghosts, visible ghosts searching or demanding redemption or to be laid to rest. Those are the ghosts of *ressentiment*, of the dead that demand something from the living or the dead that show the living that they have ‘not yet lived or fulfilled their lives’ (Jameson 1999, 40). Instead,

Spectrality does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist or that the past (and maybe even the future they offer to prophesy) is still very much alive and at work, within the living present: all it says, if it can be thought to speak, is that the living present is scarcely

as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us (Jameson 1999: 39).

Similarly, we should recognise that the recurrent image of Sweden's Nazi collaboration in Roy Andersson's films; the suicide or the murdered in Gus Van Sant's films; the beggars and dispossessed on the streets of Kishinev in Aristakisyan's *Palms*, make no attempt to conform to the didactic or narrative modes of reconciliation administered by the cinema. The cinema cannot redeem them in that sense, cannot settle scores or fulfil incomplete or unrecognised lives. Instead, they intervene in the present of the viewing experience, destabilising it, forcing the self-containment of dramatic narrative open with the presence of the restless forces of the 'real'. Pier Paolo Pasolini, writing in the late 1960s (a point to be returned to in Chapter Five), described an image in the 'historic present' as conferring a meaning, not so much predetermined, but configured on the basis of its duration having passed and as such, shows us the evidence of 'something' – a landscape, a violent act. Cinema, operating after the fact, watched or re-watched after the fact, maintains this 'historic present' as a ghost, as Derrida puts it, a '*non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*' (Derrida 2006, xviii, original in italics).

So despite Derrida's own ambivalence towards aesthetics, the cinema can potentially be reconfigured as an equivalent to the disturbing quality of the spectre that interrupts the smooth running of the present. It offers the retention of the ability to disturb, cut loose from the effective means of codifying or commodifying all transgressions, outrages or necessary demands for another kind of sense. As Jameson suggests, a theoretical movement, or passage between past, present and future meanings, simultaneously withdrawn, can be located in an aesthetic equivalence that is antifoundational yet irreducible, exposed in an event that continues to 'haunt' via its remaining incomplete and uninterpreted.

It is in this sense that the 'idea' of redemption – its demand – remains within the films set out in this thesis. Through their deliberate presentation and disruption of the symbols of redemption they retain its presence at the same time as they visibly reinforce its absence. They open a space between the symbols of redemption and its translation or recovery into myth, narrative or image. But, equally, they do not consign it to history or to a proof of failure. In the later chapters (five to eleven) the question of the ghostly demand for redemption will be derived from the specific films as it occurs in the haunted landscape and destiny of war, in *Flanders* for

example; or how it maintains itself amid the ghostly echoes of history that resonate through *The Asthenic Syndrome*, *Palms* or *Russian Ark* even as the vision of the future is repeatedly obscured. Obscurity and vision will propel Jean-Luc Nancy's reworking of this Derridean theme as he develops it towards a more clearly applicable aesthetic effect, itself derived from his overall formula for 'sense', and for which the 'poetic' (and cinematic) impacts equally with philosophy on rendering experience. This is not to suggest that this is a satisfactory formula for a future philosophy or politics, only that it offers a means to reflect on the films produced in parallel with such theories that does not reduce them to a nihilism.

Certainly, Alain Badiou, for one, has sought to distance himself from Derrida's project. In contradiction to a 'deconstructive' approach to the teleology of Western metaphysics, one that seeks to locate and emphasise the various absences in the formula of presence, deferring explicit meanings to highlight the inconsistencies and the insubstantialities on which such an overarching metaphysics has been founded, Badiou has sought to locate an axiomatics of thought in the identification and recognition of key 'events'. He challenges 'deconstruction' by demanding a break with historicism itself to realign thinking away from the question of an 'end of metaphysics' to one of identifying a 'fidelity' to the event for which an 'event' is a demonstrable change in the logic of a given situation, be it social, political, or aesthetic. In *Conditions* (1992) Badiou asserts the following:

The dominant idea [in the Heideggerian tradition] is that metaphysics has reached a point of historical exhaustion, but that what lies beyond this exhaustion has not yet been given to us [...]. Philosophy is then caught between the exhaustion of its historical possibility and the non-conceptual arrival of a salutary overturning. Contemporary philosophy combines the deconstruction of its past with the empty expectation of its future. My entire goal is to break with this diagnosis [...] Philosophy must break with historicism from within itself (in Nancy 2004: 42).

Jean-Luc Nancy, responding to Badiou's desire to 'break' with historicism and the preoccupation with its exhaustion, has questioned the possibility of such a break in the light of the fact that, as he sees it, metaphysics crucially *is* historical. The exhaustion of metaphysics is the exhaustion of historical possibility as it has been developed in Western philosophy as a possibility of carrying any

conceptual structure (secular or religious) through to an end, to a final term. It is the limit situation that calls into question the possibilities of beginnings and ends. Philosophy cannot be absolved from its own historicity, which is what leads Nancy to develop the proposition of a 'sense' of the world that is anterior to beginnings and ends (Nancy 2004, 43).

For Badiou the present problem confronting metaphysical inquiry is one of an exhaustion of historical possibility and the failure of a conceptual means to reassert philosophy, in response to which he proclaims a necessary break with historicism. Because of this, the conditions of being should be defined axiomatically through a form of neo-Platonism, that is, as concepts alone not linked to the variations of poetics (Hallward 2004, 5). However, Nancy argues, it is necessarily a *poetics* that is best placed to give evidence of the suspensions, interruptions and ruptures that expose the conditions of being at their limits. Therefore, it is not a matter of breaking with historicism, since metaphysics is historical, but instead, of making evident the limits of historical possibility.

In an essay responding directly to Badiou's 'break with historicism' Nancy argues that the Western tradition of metaphysical history is a kind of *physics*, that is, it has always attempted to distil its concepts into a 'natural history' such that rationality is carried through to the point of locating its incontrovertible 'ground'. It is this notion of 'carrying through to an end' that is exhausted (Nancy 2004: 42). However, what remains after the exhaustion of the possibility of defining an end point is precisely the 'sense' of the world: the sense which emerges as a multiple, fragmented real of existence that is made evident by its very limits. The constant interchange of prescriptive meanings (a ripple effect of beginnings and ends, the constant production of principles and objectives), what he calls the 'anxiety about meaning' which has defined metaphysics, is 'merely the recurring effect of a mythico-religious "physics" seeking to regain control of itself in spite of metaphysics or through it' (Nancy 2004: 47).

Since Nancy's deconstructionist approach will figure substantially in relation to chapters five to ten addressing the specific films, the question of his integration of the artwork into an ontology of 'sense' is central. For this reason, in the context of a parallel movement of philosophy and aesthetics, the remainder of this chapter aims to set out the wider background of Nancy's position, prior to a closer examination in Chapter Four of aesthetics and the cinema.

For Nancy, philosophy's real problem lies in its claim to the purity of concepts – a critique that can be traced back to his earliest writing on Kant and Descartes from the 1970s and

80s – and the implication that because philosophy is itself dependent on language and the perceptual conventions of literary production and technique its concepts can never be totally ‘pure’. In *Logodaedalus* (1976), a reading of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, he highlights the distinction between the key terms, *Darstellung*, or ‘presentation’ and *Dichtung*, ‘invention’. In a close study of Nancy’s thought Ian James highlights this central problem:

the clear and distinct presentation (*Darstellung*) of forms, concepts, categories, and so on, [...] cannot achieve the (mathematical) exactitude or adequation of presentation proper, and so, as presentation, it also demands or is necessarily rooted in invention (*Dichtung*) (James 2006: 40).

Metaphysics must necessarily engage in a radical ambivalence that seeks an *a priori* reason abstracted from all sensible contingencies whilst forced to retain a discursive exposition that is forever mitigated by the fluctuations of creative or rhetorical discourse. The conditions, or truth procedures, that Badiou asserts for philosophy must themselves have a ‘pre-condition’ which is ‘indissociably historical, technical and transcendental’ since ‘it is necessary insofar as it is the reason for philosophy as metaphysics, and yet contingent because there is no reason for this reason’ (Nancy 2004: 47). This ‘pre-condition’ that Nancy seeks to recognise is given the general term ‘sense’ in opposition to ‘meaning’ and ‘truth’ (Nancy 2004, 47). It contextualises all of Nancy’s philosophical and aesthetic inquiry and is evidenced by the limit situations and fluctuating motions that, through ceaseless agitation and the ‘infiniteization of ends’, expose ‘sense’. It is not, however, a process: that would imply a direction and therefore a beginning and end, rather than a threshold or fluctuating border (Nancy 2004: 49). It is this delineation of the double-bind between *Darstellung* and *Dichtung* that recurs in his approach to aesthetics and artworks and has a bearing on his particular ‘realist’ interpretation of the cinema.

Like Jacques Derrida and many of the generation of philosophers to emerge in France in the late 1960s and early 70s, Nancy engages with the central question of the ‘end’ or ‘overcoming’ of metaphysics that followed from the groundbreaking legacies of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Nancy, then, seeks to untangle ‘sense’ in the form of a shared material existence sensitive to phenomena that already *make sense* prior to language or symbolic structures. This ‘sense’ is the element in which signification and meanings can be said to occur. Ian James has

pointed out that it is in such terms that Nancy can be seen as a particular kind of ‘materialist’ and ‘realist’ philosopher, since his approach derives from the evidence of a shared, embodied existence, but one that is not identified either with some underlying cause or timeless essence that makes possible the world of appearances (James 2006: 9).

As Chapter Four will show in more detail, and with reference to previous ‘realist’ approaches to the cinema, it is through this realignment of ‘realism’ that Nancy offers a differently nuanced perspective on film. It diverts realism away from the overburdened legacies of an indexical ‘real world’, and at the same time, removes any psychological unity, what might be thought of as the shoring up of the subject as does the existential angst of modernism. Instead, it offers a shared recognition of sensory experience that is simultaneously both symbolic and phenomenological. At the same time, this ‘sense’ both exceeds and never entirely fulfills its terms. In this way, the real (of ‘sense’) operates in the same way whether applied to an indexically realist film such as *Elephant* or *Flanders*, an indexically realist film with partial set-builds and shot in monochrome, such as *Sátántangó*, or a film of studio artifice, trompe-l’oeil scenery and non-naturalistic make-up effects, as in Roy Andersson’s work.

Nancy’s reworking of ‘realism’ as ‘sense’ rethinks the terms of images – especially cinematic images – as representations of a projected real world presented outside of itself to one in which the world and its images are manifestly the same: they are fragments of that world, giving onto that world. In this, they both reveal and withdraw ‘truths’, in the sense of fulfilled or originary meanings, to continually ‘exscribe’ meaning: the neologism Nancy adopts.

The thought of the sense of the world is a thought that, in the course of being-thought, itself becomes indiscernable from its *praxis*, a thought that tendentially loses itself as ‘thought’ in its proper exposition to the world, a thought that *exscribes* itself there, that lets sense carry it away, ever one step more, beyond signification and interpretation (Nancy 1997: 9).

This ‘sense’ of the world necessarily depends on a development of the formula for being-in-the-world put forward by Heidegger: a formula that itself evolves from the radical rupture of the systematic search for foundational or transcendent signifiers for knowledge put forward by Nietzsche. His dismantling of the transcendent base of knowledge, be it the Judeo-Christian God

or the Platonic Idea, is then followed by Heidegger's destruction of the traditions of individual, anthropocentric beings.

At the same time Edmund Husserl's phenomenological account of space and time presents consciousness as that which is given purely from perceptual encounters with an always already existing world. Ian James remarks of Husserl's reasoning:

What interests Husserl is that within this constant flux, this mass of heterogeneous data which makes up the preempirical expanse or diffusion of the senses, an order and a unity occurs, which means that we perceive things, things which have their own self-same identity and remain positioned within determinate contexts or locations and places. (James 2006: 77).

Heidegger had challenged Husserl's perspective on the basis that it was preoccupied with a system of retentions and protentions pin-pointed on moments of presence interior to being-in-the-world. In contrast, Heidegger was concerned with a state of being that is temporally rooted in the past and thrust into the future. In short, experience is not interior to consciousness but always exterior to it.

Heidegger's insistence that the constitutive features of experience cannot be reduced to mental states, but must be seen in terms of pragmatic worldly engagements, transforms the phenomenological project from a search for atemporal, logical, and meaning-constituting essences to an attempt to describe an event of being which would, in essence, be historical and subject to a certain fundamental historicity (James 2006: 84).

Nancy aims to move beyond both Husserl and Heidegger, whilst retaining a degree of both, to describe 'sense' as an ontological term that accounts for the spatio-temporal event of being and as existing before language and symbolic structures. He follows the phenomenological conception of being as the spatio-temporal event of being: an opening onto what is intelligible as such, rather than in terms of specific beings or entities. He also goes beyond the notion of grounded consciousness as the locus of experience, attempting instead, to delineate being through an opening onto, or a suspension of, a limit situation and a passage of sense.

Through this series of precedents Nancy arrives at a position not dissimilar from his contemporary, Derrida. As he notes himself,

‘Neither a word nor a concept,’ writes Derrida of *différance*. This is, in short, the definition of sense, or better, the sense of sense: to be neither word nor concept, neither signifier nor signified, but sending and divergence, and nonetheless (or even for that very reason) to be a gesture of writing, the breaking [*frayage*] and forcing of an a the entire signification and destination of which (in French the *à* [or in English the *to*] of the *a*) is to *exscribe itself*: to go up and touch the concretion of the world where existence makes sense (Nancy 1997: 14).

His principle divergence from Derrida comes from his readiness to put forward a material, bodily, real of existence tuned to a multi-sensory experience. This realist aspect of Nancy’s ontology circulates around the locus of the body which he insists is a lived, material existence before it is a container for representations. He privileges the sense of touch to a greater extent than the visual to the extent that he has even extended the sense of touch to his writing on the cinema: as a felt contact with the ‘evidence’ of the image and its succession – instantaneously appearing and disappearing (Nancy 2001: 42). Within the space of each image the representational symbols of myth or tradition fluctuate with the phenomenological impressions of an always already existing world. Together they combine to produce ‘sense’. It is not, as again Chapter Four considers more closely, an either/or between the transcendent and the immanent.

‘Sense’ is configured as something other than the codes of representation, becoming a touching or ‘contact’. In an elusive passage on painting Nancy writes that ‘sense’ is characterised by a ‘clear obscurity’ (Nancy 1997: 81). He distinguishes the ‘clarity of the obscure’ from the Western tradition of *chiaroscuro* – the rendering of contrasted light and shadow so much associated with the photographic and cinematic traditions. *Chiaroscuro* seeks to ‘present sense as a mystery’ associated with an era of Western painting that ‘participates in metaphysical revelations or celebrations’ (Nancy 1997: 82). With the exhaustion of metaphysics, painting is ‘on the threshold between intactness and touching – between the intactness and touching *of* light and shadow’ (Nancy 1997: 82). Within the image that we see, we also feel and hear and taste: all these aspects of experience remain ‘infinitely intact’. But that does not reveal everything. At this limit

‘always attained and always withdrawn, sense is suspended, not as sense more or less deciphered, but as the obscure tact of clarity itself’ (Nancy 1997: 83). Finally, this passage can be extended to artworks in general: ‘there is no art that is not the art of a clear touch on the obscure threshold of sense’ (Nancy 1997: 83).

In this way we can begin, for example, to see the implacable whale of *Werckmeister Harmonies* as a ‘clear obscurity’. This creature or object is presented in the film, as it is presented to the small Hungarian town of the ‘story’, as the mystery of light and shadow and the promise that from the void of darkness within its container some illumination, or revelation, will transpire. To that end it is loaded with metaphysical expectations, fuelled by apocalyptic prognostications and the murmuring intensity of the gathering crowd in search, seemingly, of some meaning or event to coincide with its arrival, its symbolism. But it remains implacable to the last. After the riot, when it is finally fully exposed to the misty daylight amid the wreckage of its container, it continues to be itself: instantly recognisable, but resolutely refusing to give up secrets at all. It is both present and absent – present as a whale, or its carcass – but dead, absent as life or the life of that whale. It is a side-show exhibit. It may not even be a ‘real’ whale but a fake: instantly recognisable as a fake whale. As an object it is the limit of real and unreal, mystery and revelation. Everything in the film seems driven or derived from this whale, or its arrival. Its eye remains fixedly open, staring, but not revealing. Everything about the whale is both known and unknown, felt but not understood. It is something both more and less than a ‘plot-device’. It is not wedded to characters or events in a relation of causality. Its arrival is no more or less effective than the weather. In Nancy’s terms, it is *exscribed* into the film.

From an aesthetic perspective, it is identified as a fragment of sense in itself, a presentation of sense, rather than a representation of a grounded idea, whether immanent or transcendent. What is ‘exscribed’ (rather than inscribed within the logic of established models of meaning) is that which simultaneously resists inscription and remains ‘undecidable’ (in the common terms of ‘deconstruction’). It is those elements that interrupt and suspend any attempt at laying a metaphysical foundation. Artworks can then be seen as material artefacts that in turn present a shared world and experiential events that make sense despite resisting their reduction into the conformity of tradition or predetermined orders or genres of signification. ‘Sense’, for Nancy, is less concerned with the imitation of a phenomenal reality than it is present in the sensible, material aspects of the work and its disturbance of meaning.

The prioritising of the sensible and sensuous stems from a concept of aesthetics first claimed by Hegel. Art has entered its 'final phase' (which for Hegel was Romantic art), the reconciliation of 'spirit' (or idea) in the manifestation (or form) that provides a concrete presentation of the absolute. As Ian James points out, this is the apotheosis of art in accord with the terms of Hegel's own dialectic system (James 2006: 209). Nancy, however, locates a 'blockage' in this dialectic that is (as with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*) located around the problem that neither the language of philosophy nor the language of literature (and art) is entirely sufficient to achieve the effect it desires. This 'blockage' is an irreducible and irresolvable impossibility of reconciliation between expression and absolute knowledge or speculative thought. It is precisely this impasse, or limit situation, that gives rise to the opportunity of the artwork connecting with 'sense'. An artwork is not the achievement of its own dialectical unity, nor the impossibility of such, but the points and moments in which the functioning of such dialectics is interrupted or suspended. It is at these moments that a presentation or a disclosure of the world occurs.

This presentation becomes the presentation of the artwork's own present, its figure or form, and it is the presentation of 'sense', the sense of an always already present manifestation of the world. This is the 'realism' around which the twin configurations of presentation or presence come together. Nancy writes:

Art isolates or forces the moment of the *world* as such, the being-world of the world, not as a milieu in which a subject moves, but as exteriority and exposition of a being-in-the-world, exteriority and exposition grasped formally, isolated and presented as such. Therefore the world is dislocated into plural worlds, or more exactly, into an irreducible plurality of the unity 'world'. (in James 2006: 218)

This opening onto the 'plurality' of the world, of 'sense', carries itself over, in principle, to the specific operation of the cinema:

Cinema – its screen, its sensitive membrane – stretches and hangs between a world in which representation was in charge of the signs of truth, of the heralding of a meaning, or

of the warrant of a presence to come; and another world that opens onto its own presence through a voiding where its thoughtful evidence *realizes* itself. (Nancy 2001: 56)

This sense can equally disregard the potential anachronism of the image of the screen ‘stretched and hung’. Whether the cinema remains as reflected light on a screen, or is seen as a back projected image or as a digital screen image, the fundamental point to take from Nancy’s illustration is that of an orientation on the part of the film, of the act of filming as an act of looking, that seeks to realise and bring forward those aspects of the world that escape or refuse meaning, to formally assemble an excess of passing evidence that persistently resists integration into a representation of any sort of meaning, whether that meaning is located in a narrative-dramatic system or a subject oriented identity.

This attitude or orientation toward a film-making that seeks to ‘look’ and thereafter, to ‘show’, before or despite its intention or ability to represent is similarly evoked by the Austrian director Ulrich Seidl. He has remarked on the difference between an attitude that seeks to interrogate film images for meaning and one that seeks to identify film images with aspects of the world: ‘I think that, too often, we tend to judge films by whether they’re optimistic or whether they’re dark or pessimistic. That’s not the first question for me at all. I think the first question should be why I show something and how I show it’ (Seidl 2009).

That which Seidl presents as a question, a challenge, (*why do I show this?*), Nancy presents as creation, or the point of creation and the possibility of a new thought, a new reflection; what he calls a ‘birth’ in place of ‘death’ that has so ‘fascinated Western thought’ (Nancy 1993: 3).

Before all representational grasp, before a consciousness and its subject, before science, and theology, and philosophy, there is that: the *that* of, precisely, *there is*. But ‘there is’ *is* not itself a presence, to which our signs, our demonstrations, and our monstrations might refer. One cannot ‘refer’ to it or ‘return’ to it: it is always, already, there, but neither in the mode of ‘being’ (as a substance) not in that of ‘there’ (as a presence). It is there in the mode of being born: to the degree that it occurs, birth effaces itself, *and* brings itself indefinitely back. Birth is the slipping away of presence through which everything comes to presence (Nancy 1993: 4).

It is here, that, in something like a re-focusing on the ‘real’ (of ‘sense’) that the cinematic image can point to a certain kind of redemption – its ‘weak messianism’.

In summary, the end of the Cold War and Soviet Communism has led to the suggestion that history itself has reached an impasse. In place of a post-war modernism still wedded to certain teleologies of political and subjective emancipation, we have been left with a ‘post-historical’ void – a ‘post-modernity’ that revels in the reconstitution of traditional paradigms, either as irony or pastiche; an endless simulacrum of appearances without context or content; or the perpetual crisis of community that is marked by constant relativism. In each case we are left with an endless repetition of the bad: of violence and destruction redeployed as spectacle (political or aesthetic) and devoid of redemption in anything other than its most fundamental form of reifying dogma, whether in the form of religious terror or the consumption of commercially defined aesthetics.

As a counterpoint to this set of conditions, this thesis argues that certain films from within this period suggest an alternative orientation toward the redemptive wager through an aesthetic practice that resembles particular philosophical positions. These films set out in the introduction, have especially sought to emphasise and, at the same time, problematise the symbols of redemption through a formula of presentation and withdrawal that recalls both Jacques Derrida’s suggestive conception of a ‘hauntology’ and, more specifically, Jean-Luc Nancy’s configuration of ‘sense’ as the reinscription of traces of experience and world events for which the film is a fragment of that sense.

Derrida creates a conceptual term for the refusal of the past and its demands on the future to be laid to rest; a term that specifically highlights the interruption in the present and towards the future, and that which remains unaccounted for. In this respect, he reasserts the Christian legacy of messianism, not in its figural sense, nor that of any image or narrative, but simply through the affect of the demand. Nancy recasts the ephemeral and translucent character of the ‘spectre’ into the real itself: into a material or evident image in the artwork; the ghost, as such, becomes a fragment of sense.

Robert Stam, in his introductory gloss of the development of film theory, observes that in the wake of Derrida’s early writings, a partial lexicon of Derridean terms (‘trace,’ ‘dissemination,’ ‘logocentrism,’ ‘excess’) entered film theoretical discourse, particularly via the French journal *Tel Quel* and was especially developed by writers such as Julia Kristeva (Stam 2000:180). However, as Stam points out, this writing tended to overburden an aesthetic militancy

that sought to find explicitly political discourse from the disruption of traditional forms (Stam 2000: 181-2); a tendency that continued to tie political discourse to the binary of disruptive montage and self-reflexivity of apparatus.

In an early article in this vein, 'Ellipsis on Dread and the Specular Seduction', Kristeva, writing of the screen/viewer relationship in the genres of horror and thriller, opposes the terms 'speculation' – a reassuring, socialising signification of the image – and 'specular' – the monstrous 'trace' or 'terror' that 'erupts into the *seen*.' The 'specular' is found in the forms of 'primary processes' ('displacements, condensations, tones, rhythms, colors, patterns'), 'always in excess as compared with the represented, the signified' (Kristeva 1986: 237). She extracts those elements in the image that are in excess of signification and loads them with a performative task: they must be made to speak via 'distanciation' and 'demystification' (Kristeva 1976: 242), the anti-narrative, anti-conformist tropes of modernism, rather than speak via themselves as a contact with the world at the limits of representation.

Prior to responding with Nancy's version of 'excess' and 'trace', as well as elaborating on his 'realism' with respect to the cinema's long engagement with that term, the following chapter will pay some attention to the modernist configuration of both the real and its redemptive implications. The reason for this is twofold: firstly, it underscores the historically and politically inflected account of the cinema that sees realism as inscribed into an imperfect ideological model, an account that Nancy's ontological themes seek to escape. Secondly, it raises the question of redemption as an aesthetic or conceptual practice, formulated around the articulation of montage and, in short, asks: what exactly is being redeemed?

CHAPTER 3

Redemption as an Aesthetic or Conceptual Practice

The French film theorist, Serge Daney, interviewed Jean-Luc Godard in 1988 as the director was completing the first parts of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1989), his intense videographic account of a century of cinema. As Godard down-loaded the images of one hundred years of cinema directly into twentieth century history and its political ideologies, Daney observed that the interstitial means of articulation had been elevated to become the intrinsically historical element, the century's force:

Godard's fundamental premise hasn't changed: the cinema has always sought only one thing – montage – something twentieth-century man has desperately needed (Daney 1992: 159).

In this interpretation, montage has become the measure of modernity and, more than that, the means of both cinema's and modernity's collective redemption.

What this chapter aims to highlight is that the question of the truth and fiction of the cinema – its innocence and guilt – formulated by the essential articulation of montage, is an overburdened one; that this 'force' – a constant movement, whether as part of myth or dialectical synthesis – is always seeking some kind of overcoming. In Chapter Four, we will return to Jean-Luc Nancy's reorientation of the real through an emphasis on the cinema's essential 'looking'. As he writes in *The Evidence of Film*, 'This is not about the fascination of images: it is about images insofar as they open onto what is real and insofar as they alone open onto it. The reality of images is the access to the real *itself* [...]' (Nancy 2001: 16). As such, montage needs to be reconfigured through suspension or hiatus; as a failure to assert or construct meaning and as, instead, the interruption of meaning that opens onto the excess of 'sense'. Moreover, and in respect of the themes of violence and 'evil/fallibility', montage itself has been equally overburdened by its own implicit violence – its formal violence – and as the locus of the violent within the cinema. From the early 'cinema of attractions' to the presence and absence of the terms of the 'final solution' at

Auschwitz, proclaimed by Godard, montage as history, destruction and restitution comes to the fore.

Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, as Jacques Rancière has meticulously argued in *Film Fables*, attempts to redeem the iconicity of images from their corruption in the power-politics of representation and from the insistence of traditional (bourgeois) stories; from the organisational articulation of order out of the disorder of historical events. Only when the cinema can truly recognise a pure presence in its images can it resist its betrayal by the coercion of selective meaning and find its truth. The film image, in this account, resembles the 'veil of Veronica' (Rancière 2006: 182), the 'true image' of the face of Christ made by its contact with the cloth used to wipe his brow during the stations of the cross. Godard seeks to retrieve those fragmentary images of cinema's history, torn from its stories, melodramas, or the factual accounts of its newsreels, to recast them, retrospectively, as the lost glimpses that foreshadowed the catastrophe to come: a point made explicit in his juxtaposition of the images and stark lighting of Weimar cinema with Nuremberg's fictions and its spectacles of power. To do this, however, Godard himself has to rely on the intrinsically retrospective use of montage, separating out the plot points or the fragments of suspense, jeopardy, or revelation from the formulae of narrative, to reconstitute them strategically as the instants in which the cinema failed to recognise the truths it could tell: 'cinema dramatized time and again the delirium of power in fiction and the revenge of the real on the fictional. But this very anticipation spells out a new guilt: cinema failed to recognize the catastrophe it itself announced, it failed to see what its images foretold' (Rancière 2006: 181).

The irony that Godard cannot avoid, as Rancière concludes, is that to free the icons of history from the manipulation of stories he must resort to the formal unification of retrospective montage: 'History, properly speaking, is this relationship of interiority that puts every image into relation with every other; it is what allows us to be where we are not, forge all the connections that had not been forged, and then replay all the "(hi)stories" differently' (Rancière 2006, 186). Godard enforces the redemptive necessity of this act of replaying by ordaining it with a provocatively religious determination. The declaration that 'The Image will come at the Resurrection' evokes a Christological emphasis on a redemption of the 'spirit' of the image freed from its consubstantiality in the 'fallen flesh' of the body of the text, or its particular narratives and particular histories. There is something of the self-flagellating zealot at work behind Godard's

project to save the cinema at the very same time as ending it, effectively, in the apocalyptic couplet of exploding its archive into fragments and judging the fragments from their initial present against the past catastrophes of history – a ploy that clearly recalls Walter Benjamin’s ‘Angel of History’ hurtling into the future whilst gazing backwards at the wreckage piling in its wake (Benjamin 1999: 249).

The spectre of Benjamin looms large over Godard’s project. Much as the angel continues to be blown unstoppably away from paradise – for Godard perhaps a cinematic Eden at the gates of the Lumière Factory – so *Histoire(s)* continued to pile its wreckage throughout the 1990s, producing a towering eight parts by 1998. Nevertheless, the proclamation that ‘The Image will come at the Resurrection’ comes from the first section released in 1989 and underpins the essential binarism of Godard’s historical account – one that aligns Europe and the ‘lost’ national cinemas of Soviet montage, German Expressionism, French poetic realism and Italian neo-realism in a political stance against the hegemony of a Hollywood-dominated, and fascist inspired, industrial monolith. It is a binarism that also recalls Benjamin’s seminal essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ in which concerns, ranging widely across the radical consciousness-changing experience of modernity, alight, finally, on the aesthetic/political split: that of an instrumental rationality that renders (fascist) ideology aesthetic and for which a communist response must reside in the politicisation of art – a politicisation for which montage is its means (Benjamin 1999: 230). Yet Benjamin had also identified, in perhaps the most enigmatic portion of the essay, the possibility of a glimpse of an irreducible ‘reality’ – the ‘orchid in the land of technology’ (Benjamin 1999: 226) – that can counter the ‘reality effect’ that burdens cinematic images with ideology. Miriam Hansen has identified this metaphor as underlying Benjamin’s attempts to point to a mode of experience founded on the ‘optical unconscious’ (Hansen 1987: 208). Like Freud’s linguistic ‘slips’ – or, later, Barthes’ photographic ‘punctum’ – it reflects those moments in which a fragment of the ‘real,’ an element that escapes the orders of signification or the Symbolic, sneaks into the photographic image unnoticed. It disrupts its intentions and resonates with unexpected inflections as well as, in a retrospective mode, isolates a point where images can themselves return to proclaim their own undoing. Hansen establishes how, in Benjamin’s terms, such a ‘reality’ is not determined simply by its mimetic capacities but, rather, by the attitude of looking – consistent with the mode of the flâneur – that registers ‘the sediments of experience that are no longer or not yet claimed by social and economic rationality’ (Hansen

1987: 209). It is this attitude of looking that Godard proclaims the cinema to have ultimately turned away from. Instead, as Rancière observes, it ‘surrendered the power of its mute speech to the tyranny of words and the power of its images to the huge industry of fiction, the industry of sex and death that substitutes for our gaze a world illusorily in accord with our desires’ (Rancière 2006: 180).

Godard, like Benjamin before him, alludes to a purity of image configured as indelible moments, fragmentary instants in which the contingent, the untainted or the unsigned breaks through the façade of ideological spectacle. He reduces the manipulations of narrative or historical discourse to isolated acts, gestures or still images, in effect, freezing the moving image at the point at which he freezes history, to pronounce guilty the failure of cinema to recognise what its images reveal of history. For Godard, in retrospect, the cinema itself is fallen. As Rancière concludes, ‘[m]aybe the most intimate melancholy of Godard’s project is that it demonstrates everywhere the innocence of this art that should be guilty in order to prove, *a contrario*, its sacred mission’ (Rancière 2006: 186).

Godard’s project is ultimately a modernist one, in the sense that he retains a nostalgia for a cinema that could radically intervene in the world, even revolutionise it. Its failure, for which it is guilty, is the failure to effect an alternative history. Yet the timing of the initial release of *Histoire(s)*, coinciding with the collapse of European communism, draws attention to the link between the century’s modernist revolutionary rhetoric for which the conceptual aesthetics of montage – advocated by Godard, as by Benjamin before him – was so crucial.

It is worth noting the distinction that James Monaco draws between the different terms of ‘montage’ and ‘editing’. ‘Editing’ – the term identified with the practices of classical narrative developed predominantly through the American studio system – is a function of paring back, of cutting down, with the declared objective of an invisibility that concentrates all attention on the flow of narrative, action and empathy. ‘Montage’ – a term more popular in European film historical developments – implies a function of building, ‘working up from the raw material’, and culminates in the objective of a construction or a synthesis (Monaco 2000: 216). It can be destructive but its destruction is necessarily revolutionary. Hence, a modernist aesthetics of montage is built on an essential violence, a shattering or breaking apart of perceived norms with the aim of establishing a new foundation. In short, early modern cinema attempted to explode the unity of a classical cinema that was based on the narrative and representational logic of a certain

kind of nineteenth-century literary drama by initiating a radicalised unity of form from the raw material of modernity. A late modern cinema then attempts to come to terms with so many failures of modernity as a loss of meaning configured in a century that had brought about so many catastrophes, and assemble its dislocated images in an existential movement of the subject towards death. The post-modern cinema, in attempting to overcome this loss of meaning, only betrays its obsession with meaning in its ironic restitution of classical traditions.

Through this repetition of foundation and overhaul there is a rhetorical sense of 'active nihilism' in the history of cinema. Recalling Critchley's description of the desire to declare the present world meaningless and to overthrow it – a perspective with a complex and tantalising relation to utopian, revolutionary and radically violent political movements (Critchley 2007: 5) – the idea of cinema presents a formal and aesthetic means to envision the challenge to ideologies. Montage (the 'thing' 'twentieth century man has desperately needed') determines the violent destruction and restitution of the perceptual world. Such rhetoric does not, however, escape nihilism; it does not confer a status or possibility for the cinema, only a commentary on the ends to which montage is put. In this sense, 'editing' and 'montage' reflect a 'passive' and 'active' nihilism: the latter as a destruction or exhaustion of an ideologically meaningless situation; the former as a kind of agnostic delirium, reifying conformity at the same time as it revels in its aesthetic destruction. The logic of both reaches its apparent zenith in the collision of montage with speed: the editing practice of excessive cutting (interlinked with explosive special effects) for which the collateral damage to bodies, architectures and landscapes disappears in the oblivion of acceleration. The edit is the cinema's sleight-of-hand, as it has been in its treatment of violence, since Hepworth's *Explosion of a Motor Car* (1900). The principle of 'slow cinema' as a critical alternative to the acceleration of editing technique has emerged in the British film journal *Sight and Sound* (James 2010: 5). The work of Béla Tarr has been at the forefront of this critical alignment, always placed in opposition to a Hollywood derived model of fast cutting (see Orr 2001; Kovács 2004).

Paul Virilio has consistently critiqued the acceleration of culture and the nihilism of modern technological media under the rubric of an 'aesthetics of disappearance' (Virilio 2006). As a Catholic-inspired theorist (Redhead 2004: 12), Virilio, in terms reminiscent of Ricoeur, has proposed a necessary realignment of the symbolic within representation as an alternative to a perceived loss of meaning through both modernist and post-modernist artworks whose

abstraction, fragmentation and relativism has eroded the pedagogy of the image through delivery of the immediacy of an event or experience (Virilio 2006: 19). Such restitution is eschewed, however, by Nancy's assertion of the need to challenge the dialectical arrangement of wholeness and fragmentation (Nancy 1997: 123). Film, whose constituent parts are always already fragments, should be approached through a perspective that does not insist on the dialectics of montage (fragmentation and wholeness) as the primary mode of analysis. In this way, the contrast of slowness and speed, centred on the continual opposition of contemplative 'art' cinema and commercial 'entertainment' cinema can be side-stepped. The 'slowness' and minimal cutting of Tarr's films, or the single shot to each scenic tableau approach of Roy Andersson's films, are less a measure of a militant conceptual practice and more the demand for a primary engagement with the world exposed in fragments but not *as* fragments that reassert an aesthetic autonomy.

Godard's modernist montage seeks a community of fragments. But the contradiction that his project betrays is that this coming together must demand an ultimate unification under a sign of 'truth' – the word of 'Godard' – as its new foundation. Dissection and isolation bring together a century of images to re-present the past. Where Godard accuses the cinema of the past of turning away from the 'true' images of its present, so he too, turns away from the images of his immediate milieu, proclaiming instead that milieu to be an historical break – an 'end of history'. Such a break collapses the rhetoric of a modernity bound, in the broadest sense, to the teleological project of communism, of community, recalling Benjamin's 'shortcircuiting' of the iconic means of the cinematic image with the political engagement of the masses (Hansen 1987, 205).

In place of the clearly defined political goals or sympathies of such a modernity comes the oft-cited generalism that post-modernity gives credence to a cinema that revels only in the restitution of archetypes and the reinvigoration of genres, of pastiche and irony, of polyvalence and self-awareness. French philosopher, Alain Badiou has recently gone so far as to characterise this latter milieu of the post-modern and the period following the collapse of European communism as a 'second Restoration', acerbically chiding its liberal politics of consensus with a sideswipe at the 'end of history' debate since, he says, 'a restoration is never anything other than a moment in history that declares revolutions to be both abominable and impossible, and the superiority of the rich both natural and excellent' (Badiou 2007: 26). It follows that for Badiou the cinema, which he elsewhere calls 'neo-classical', similarly restores the dominance of generic story archetypes at the expense of a modernist formalism (Badiou 2005: 83-94). Suffice it to say here

that Badiou seems to reiterate Godard's declaration of an historical break allied with an aesthetic 'restoration', and to lapse back into a binary opposition between an all too sweeping 'classical' Hollywood and a 'modernist' Europe and, therefore, ultimately fails, or refuses, to consider the liminal space opened out amid the ruins of the collapsed pillars of a binary historical opposition. Like Godard, Badiou also fails to consider the possibility, posed by Rancière and again by Nancy, of a cinematic image cut loose from the powers of conceptual montage.

Godard's provocation – that 'The Image will come at the Resurrection' – posits a redemption of the images of cinema's past based on the explicitly Christian hierarchy of the dualistic separation of spirit and matter, soul and body – here applied to the cinematic image, replayed, reanimated, 'resurrected' – for which the *spirit*, given meaning by the application of the Word (its retrospective 'truth') takes precedence over the dead matter of the image and the narrative context from which it was extracted, as from an autopsy. It is because of this dualistic structure that the image can be redeemed in this mode of address since, as Rancière points out, the cinema's images, though innocent, have already been pronounced guilty 'to prove their sacred mission'.

The principal argument of this chapter, then, is that a recurring theme of retrospective revisionism of film history takes place around the locus of an aesthetic break or 'end' commensurate with the 'post-historical' era. As well as Godard and Badiou, films by Chris Marker and Guy Debord, and film theoretical texts by Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben offer a concerted effort to redeem or resurrect the images of history and of cinema. At the same time, each asserts montage as the power that overcomes representation. In doing so, they ultimately deliver a contradictory restitution of the real. It is this contradiction that will point us towards Nancy's real, as sense, and the film as a fragment of experience. It offers an alternative approach to the films that follow, films that more clearly mirror the philosophical terms of 'post-history' set out in chapter two. This realignment seeks to redirect the locus of cinema away from the stories it tells to that of the forms of life it exposes; away from the locus of severance and the cut as point of closure in a circuit of constructed meaning towards an erosion of the links and limits of each image. The diminishing power of vision, as Nikolai enters the darkening tunnel at the close of *The Asthenic Syndrome*, or the gradual boarding up of the window, and therefore the camera's point-of-view, in *Sátántangó*, the gradual backing away from the final gun-point stand-off in *Elephant*, or the

descent into the mist and fog of *Russian Ark* reiterate the continual suspension or dissolution of images in place of the decisiveness of the cut.

It is, in a sense, the conceptual impetus of montage and its crucial role in the development of attitudes and perspectives, archetypal relations and dogmatic dialectics that ultimately posit what Alberto Toscano has called the ‘crisis within the horizon of representation’ (Toscano 2007: 181). It is, briefly, to that history that this chapter now turns.

The film director Gus Van Sant, when questioned over the treatment of violence in *Elephant*, his 2003 film of a Columbine-style high school shooting, responded with a reference to the Hollywood industry journal *Variety*’s accusation that the film was ‘irresponsible’ (McCarthy 2003). He argued that people were angered by the film’s depiction of violence – ‘the same people who love *Kill Bill* think our film is irresponsible’ – because ‘they’re believing it, and I want them to believe it: I want it to matter, not to be gratuitous violence. It’s not entertainment. It’s something else’ (in Saïd 2004: 18).

Van Sant’s elusive ‘something else’ is couched in the suggestive terms of the earliest observational films of the Lumière Brothers made at the very beginning, the ‘pre-narrative’ era, of cinema history:

Since 1915, when people started to use editing to tell a story, we’ve had the convention of the reaction shot: I say something, then we cut to your reaction, and that’s part of telling a story. But life is a continuous thing with a rhythm of its own, and when you cut to adjust that rhythm to suit the dramatic impact you create a new, false rhythm. (in Saïd 2004: 17)

Despite Van Sant’s truncated characterisation of ‘editing’ as the classical paradigm of the reaction shot that engineers and manipulates the audience’s knowledge or empathy, what he seeks to emphasise is a mode of shot construction that seeks to observe the rhythmic tension of an already happening world rather than restrict such tensions to the necessities of a principle of predetermined articulation or dramaturgy. It points to a change of obligation for the practice of film-making, even a ‘regression’ of sorts, to share a point-of-view that is looking, above a point-of-view that is concluding or defining. It is, in effect, a shift from the fascination with

representation – what do images mean in relation to each other – to a question of what image-content can be ‘presented’ or disclosed; in short, a shift of emphasis from concept to sense.

Alain Badiou has argued that what defined the twentieth century, in opposition to the utopian or scientific ‘ideals’ of the nineteenth, was the ‘*passion for the real*’ (Badiou 2007: 32 italics in original), the aim of delivering the ideal as act in itself. For Badiou, this provides an axiom that qualifies equally for large-scale projects (Communism, National Socialism) and small-scale, individual acts (such as in conceptual or performance art). Montage, in such terms, also becomes a ‘real’ act upon the images of ‘everyday life’. Before the Second World War it was characterised as the aesthetic means to make manifest the revolutionary turmoil of a Europe recoiling in the aftermath of the First World War and the Russian Revolution of 1917 – an instrument of the ‘active nihilism’ of Bolshevism. It was the means by which the multiple fragments of an everyday history, its masses, its moments, human and inhuman, of nature and machine, could be combined to reveal their elementary contribution to the great projects of emancipation, or else they would be, as they were, co-opted into the burgeoning spectacles of Fascist or capitalist power. This was the benchmark set in Benjamin’s famous essay. In it, the comparison of the cameraman with the surgeon who ‘cuts into the patient’s body’, as the metaphor for the ‘penetration’ of reality’s ‘web’ by a camera that produces ‘multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law’ (Benjamin 1999: 227), is replete with the double-edged violence that Benjamin uses throughout the essay (and elsewhere). It is the cutting, or penetration, that can heal but also violate in its misuse: a double-edged violence that finds its locus in the aphoristic finale that condenses into a binary of ‘distraction and concentration’ (Benjamin 1999: 232) through history’s the violent confrontations:

Mankind, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art. (Benjamin 1999: 235)

Underlying the political truths that Benjamin seeks to arrange in the Janus-face of political power and its representation is the broader philosophical ambiguity of truth as a violent irruption. In a reflection on aesthetics, Nancy discusses this ambiguity in the relationship between image and

violence, violence and truth, truth and image. An ugly violence (racist, coercive) makes itself true in being violent; a 'necessary' violence (the acknowledged ambiguity spoken of in terms of divine, revolutionary, interpretative violence) unleashes its violence because of the necessity of its truth. The former exhausts itself in its act, the latter suspends itself in the 'penetration of being itself by violence (whatever the name of being: subject, history, force...)' (Nancy 2005: 18).

Soviet montage exemplified a revolutionary, interpretative violence that is imagined and acted upon the images of the present; on all images, whether they depict the insurrectionary conflict of *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) or the thickening of cream in *The General Line* (1929). By contrast, the images of violence and destruction (all the accidents, murders, executions and assassinations of early cinema) inherited from the fairgrounds, 'freak' shows and popular press, conformed to the moralising of accepted historical, dramatic and societal discourses.

As the continuing presence of conflict, exploitation, violence and degradation continues apace within the socio-political conditions left in the wake of the former Cold War structure, Benjamin's insistence on the question of a 'distraction' or 'concentration' around the aesthetico-political gives way to an open-ended era of destruction for aesthetic pleasure. The argument here proposed is that the resistance to such pleasure comes not from the alternative demands of the modernist, couched in the terms of an articulated, self-reflexive montage and the grounding of a particular politics, but in the insistence on the gaze, the exposure to the violent content of the image at the limit situation of its articulation. As Nancy concludes:

Violence without violence consists in the revelation's not taking place, its remaining imminent. Or rather it is the revelation of this: that there is nothing to reveal. By contrast, violent and violating violence reveals and believes that it reveals absolutely. Art is not a simulacrum or an apotropaic form that would protect us from unjustifiable violence (from Nietzsche's Gorgon-truth or Freud's blind instinct). It is the exact knowledge of this: that there is nothing to reveal, not even an abyss, and that the groundless is not the chasm of a conflagration, but imminence infinitely suspended over itself (Nancy 2005: 26).

Montage, as an attempt to make sense of such acts through an intervention, fracturing and reconstruction seeks to recover meaning through its own act of violence as such. Montage

configured as the mechanism of redemption thereby ‘redeems’ attempts to distinguish a raw image from the veneer of a represented fiction. However, the elevation to primacy of the shot offers a demand, not through the mechanism of association but as an orientation, calling into question an act through a delineation of its happening. It locates itself in the particular orientation of filming, of presentation, that interrupts the taking place of signification and meaning leading to a *suspense*, an imminence that remains incomplete and hanging over itself. Primacy is given to the shot that exposes the taking place of a fragment of sense at the same time as withdrawing recourse to the logic of counter-shot or dialectic that confers a determined empathy or interpretation. Hence the logic of montage as it has been rhetorically played out in the cinema is necessary to locate this shift from a focus on the terms of re-presented images to the presentation of images as an exposure of ‘sense’ – as an obligation toward that which takes place in the world.

Important work in the 1980s – by Tom Gunning, Noël Burch, André Gaudreault, among others – re-examined the earliest films from the so-called ‘pre-narrative’ (pre-1910) period that Van Sant evokes. They looked at these films according to the principles of their editing techniques and as such, laid out a structural course that at one and the same time identified the systems out of which narrative logic emerged as the hegemony of classical narrative. They alluded to the possibility that such a formula for narrative was not an historical inevitability but an act of ideological coercion and that at its core, the cinema retains the means to present sensuous phenomena within configurations that eschew the paradigms of dramatic narrative as it has come to dominate. Gaudreault adopted the term ‘monstration’ (Gaudreault 1990) to draw attention to the act of ‘showing’ that was initially given primacy over ‘telling’.

Gunning and Gaudreault called the cinema operating within initial categories of ‘monstration’ a ‘cinema of attractions’ (Gunning 1990: 101). The key innovation of these theorists was to posit the early ‘pre-narrative’ phase of cinema as a distinct method and not as simply the ‘primitive’ struggles of a narrative form yet to find its full articulation. Such cinematic techniques revelled in a particular mode of display derived from conjuring tricks and theatrical and musical hall performance. Most importantly, these early films were ‘enframed rather than emplotted’ (Gunning 1990: 101). Whilst ultimately their content turned to the illusionistic rather than the ‘realistic’, once the fascination for pure ‘actualities’ wore off, their essential mode of address pointed to a cinematic orientation that placed the immediacy and imminence of confrontation above the manipulation and ultimate transcendence of a predetermined exposition.

Mary Ann Doane, also writing on the earliest period of film history and the development of its form and narrative, argues that the cinema becomes a key instrument of representation in late nineteenth and early twentieth century modernity's obsession with the quantifying and mastering of contingency to the extent that violence and forms of death – the irreversible – are abundant (Doane 2002). At stake in Doane's argument is the demonstrable link between the objective representation of temporality and the subjective abstraction of temporal existence such that contingency confirmed in the system becomes the site of both pleasure and anxiety. The contingent is, in effect, 'structurally necessary to the ideologies of capitalist modernization' (Doane 2002: 11). Contingency introduces an aspect of 'normal life' into the representation of time. However, Doane's central theme is precisely that the cinema played a crucial part in modernity's taming of chance for the purpose of establishing a representational formula for existence:

The cinema's struggles with contingency repeat, in the field of representation, the 'taming of chance' that takes place in sociology, philosophy, and the sciences during roughly the same time period. [...] [T]he growing acknowledgement and acceptance of chance and indeterminism did not imply chaos or a loss of control. To the contrary, it consolidated the lawlike regularities of statistics and probability, and encouraged the growing numerical quality of knowledge (Doane 2002: 170).

Effectively the cinema becomes complicit in an overall ideological drive by capitalist modernity to rationalise the catastrophe of chance. It enacts a kind of 'active nihilism' in its overcoming of the sense of meaninglessness associated with chance or contingency to enforce meaning through the ordering of fragments. Within mass culture it actively seeks to turn contingency into the thrill of the spectacle. To eradicate the potential boredom of dead time it reduces contingency to an ultimately manageable control, consistency – and survivability – when faced with the jeopardy of events.

Temporality hence became the site of the critical control and regulation of cinematic meaning. The cinema had a stake in *not* allowing the event to fall outside of the domain of structure. In the cinema, as in much theoretical writing of the period, it would be more

accurate to say that the event comes to harbor contingency within its very structure (Doane 2002: 171).

Doane's book makes a case for the inevitability of classical narrative in the cinema and the rupture by the contingent that defines all subsequent anti-narrative alternatives couched in oppositional terms, with their preoccupation with the descriptive and subjective, over and above the organising principles of plot and action or cause and effect. Here, the cinema performs a representational role in the wider project of industrial modernity: the subjection of contingency to conformity. Accordingly, the earliest films of sporadic scenes and interrupting camera stoppage 'posed the threat of [...] a denial of representation itself' (Doane 2002: 31). The classical conventions that were developed by the second decade of cinema's existence provided the means to structure time and contingency in ways that mimicked or supported the broader rationalisation of time as the medium of cause and effect in an industrialised modernity. In this respect, the classical narrative presents a balm for the various assaults and violent ricochets that modernity, in all its manifestations – of speed and energy, sensual bombardment, information overload – can throw at its subjects. Montage organises the flow of fear and anxiety and configures the expedients of modernity's dark underbelly, of shock, horror or catastrophe, into a regime of order. Time and contingency, however, are mere abstractions that narrative opens out into the wider concerns of cultural and historical attention, of real intractable problems such as accident, violence or death. Doane's argument recognises an instrumental use of the cinema as an underpinning of the central, subject-oriented concept of narrative.

At other times, however, montage takes on expressly political and historical implications – the kind of 'active nihilism' associated with the utopian or the revolutionary. Discontinuity as foundational truth finds its apogee in Soviet montage derived as the means to realise the modernist desire for a dialectical form that would resonate with the modernist project. Eisenstein had already coined the term 'a cinema of attractions' as the label for the radical innovations of the early Soviet cinema in its bid to awaken the masses from their complacency and respond to the rallying call of the new Soviet century. However, Dziga Vertov deemed Eisenstein's dialectical montage too conservative. He imagined that pure sensation, rendered as a constructivist material by the artifice of the interval, the cut, would speak for itself, and in turn, speak for a world ushered in by the new Soviet 'man' (Toscano 2007: 183). Vertov, the filmmaker, theorist and

director of *Man With a Movie Camera* (1928), exemplifies the radical intentions applied to montage by early modernism. As Alberto Toscano has noted, Vertov's theories collapse an ontology of cinema (its movements, both in and of the camera) into the fundamental element of its articulation, the interval, that is the jarring rupture of flow that the cut implies; not a suture but a gaping wound. Vertov uses the metaphorical language of the cinema as an organism and the sheer violence of montage, and the interval which cutting creates, to fashion a ripping apart of reality – to spill its 'guts'. Cinema is a little over twenty years old as Vertov wishes to kill it, so that it can be born again as the inhuman machine eye (the 'kino-eye') that will rescue the coming people from their tired, bourgeois existence. Vertov wishes to emancipate the images of the world from the Nietzschean nihilism of tradition (Toscano 2007: 182-186).

Vertov does not oppose the *mechanism* of montage to the *organic body* of cinema. He dissolves this opposition in order to demonstrate how the new cinema transfigures the physiological and theatrical eye of the habituated spectator into the kino-eye, a sort of transhuman conduit for a life of sensation that can only be experienced in its vital truth to the degree that it is machinically constructed and composed (Toscano 2007: 184).

The specific content of images is never mentioned. 'Life' or 'reality' is all images; only the technique of montage can fully dissect it and reveal its true nature. Vertov is so in thrall to the technique of his apparatus that he loses all and any distinction between the things of the world at which he might direct his camera. Or else, gripped by the revolutionary fervour, he sees all images of the world as equally guilty:

Throughout [Vertov's] texts we can identify three crucial demands, related respectively to the question of genre, the struggle with the aesthetic of humanism and the relation to politics: (1) the cinema must die so that the art of cinema may live; (2) the eye must be emancipated from man; (3) we still need a cinematic October (Toscano 2007: 183).

That there are so many film theoretical efforts to determine the typology of cinematic systems removed from the content of films reduces the conceptual framework of the cinema to any kind of foundationalism. It seeks to build a scientific or instrumental base out of the articulations of

montage/editing as the conceptual ground of representation leaving the content of films to the project of specific textual analysis. Its oppositional locus of continuity (as falsity) and discontinuity (as a truth value for the experiential world) remains tied to a conceptual framework of modernity that atomises the social body into the private order of the individual (represented character or film spectator) that is dependent on the dominant metaphysics of the subject. That is, every articulation (continuity or discontinuity) is organised according to the foundation of the subject that denies a self-presence of a shared sense of looking. Continuity or discontinuity, or the terms of montage, configure a binary that becomes the locus for opposing terms of truth and fiction.

Gilles Deleuze is another theorist who proposes that images are elements of the world. He traces a shift of emphasis around the cut that is explicitly historical. To begin with, in his monumental taxonomy of cinematic signs, published in two volumes in the 1980s – *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* – Deleuze gives an account of montage that begins as variations of the movement-image. This is a general schema for images, sequences, films that present an ‘indirect image of time’ (Deleuze 2005a: 56); a formula that places the fragments of an open linear, temporal continuum (an ontological ‘real’) within a rational, organisational ‘whole’ based on logical connections of movement. He then identifies a shift from the movement-image to the time-image, a direct image of time derived from the severing of rational links derived by movement to irrational links based on subjective or indecisive connections that is historically commensurate with the effects of World War II. In short, Deleuze’s system of signs for the cinema hinges on the distinction between the allegorical weight given to the *cut* as an effect or consequence of montage. He asserted that montage was the ‘principal act of cinema’ (Deleuze 2005b: 33).

However, in *Cinema 2*, Deleuze asserts a ‘crisis’ in the order of the movement-image that brings forth the time-image. Rather than join in unity, montage now dislocates those same linkages to open intervals, separations caused by ‘irrational linkages’ whereby images cannot be read (or trusted) as being motivated by the pre- or succeeding image. Therefore, according to the time-image scheme, ‘the outside or obverse of the images has replaced the whole, at the same time as the interstice or the cut has replaced association’ (Deleuze 2005b: 206). What is emphasised as crucial is the cut between two shots precisely because it pertains to the rupture that distinguishes the rational linkage from the irrational linkage and so ultimately defines the movement-image from the time-image. What the time-image makes thinkable is what was always

present but unrealised in early cinema, an opening on to a state of ‘universal variation’ (Deleuze 2005a: 83). Montage, whether as rational or irrational linkage, is the means to access the world in its fundamental disorder, its originary, primal chaos. Jacques Rancière has acknowledged this chaos as an ontological ground in Deleuze’s thesis: ‘*The Movement-Image* uses specific cinematographic images to introduce us to the chaotic infinity of the metamorphoses of matter-light [...] *The Time-Image* shows us, through the operations of the cinematographic art, how thought deploys a power commensurate with this chaos’ (Rancière 2006: 113).

In Deleuze’s system, the images of cinema are formulated as a natural history of images; as the mobile-sections of a transcendental ground of difference: the rhizomatic plane of immanence that is the world. What makes for the type of image is the manner in which Deleuze attaches these images to history, identifying changes in the typology of images that are commensurate with the ruptures of historical events. In short, historical rupture creates differing allegorical readings of the images of cinema before and after the rupture of the Second World War.

As Jacques Rancière points out, this relation between an historical break that is commensurate with an aesthetic break speaks essentially as a ‘history of redemption’: ‘The proposed “classification” of film images is in fact the history of the restitution of world-images to themselves’ (Rancière 2006: 111). As Deleuze himself puts it, in language reminiscent of Siegfried Kracauer’s secular sacralisation of the real, ‘The link between man and world is broken. [...] The cinema must film, not the world, but belief in this world, our only link’ (Deleuze 2005b: 166).

It is here, in the assertion of a cinema of the ‘time-image’ that is affective and expressive rather than dependent on the logic of representation, of cause and effect and dialectic synthesis, that Deleuze most closely anticipates Nancy’s cinema of interruption, ‘syncopation’, ‘patency’ and the fragmentary continuity of ‘sense’. However, the similarities and significant differences should be held in reserve since they will be returned to in more detail in chapter four. What is more crucial for the moment is the primacy Deleuze maintains in an immanent world of becoming that the cut opens on to as opposed to an excess of symbolic and phenomenal elements within both image and world as one.

In contrast to Deleuze’s efforts to redeem the image and its relationship to the world though a shift in allegorical reading founded on a cut that is as much historical as aesthetic or typological, Jacques Rancière maintains the coexistence of contradictory modes of expression

within each and every image. Moreover, any intervention of history into the aesthetic forces the terms of the debate into one of fiction and falsity, or to modes of story against history and the determining of empirical criteria of 'truth'. Rancière argues that both discourses, of the historical and the fictional/poetic are a matter of the arrangement of signs and images and in that respect, are a construction of fictions. Each image becomes the locus of what can be 'seen' and what can be 'said'.

These are the two criteria that operate as the fundamental tension in what Rancière calls the 'distribution of the sensible' (Rancière 2004: 85) that functions in all discourses, whether aesthetic, historical, political, and are particularly amplified as the governing force of the cinema. The 'distribution of the sensible' formulates the modes by which perceptible facts are identified, inscribed and constructed aesthetically and therefore, are fundamentally linked to the political and communitarian (and mythic) functioning of collective understanding and discourse. In particular, film operates a continuous and fluid tension between the 'representational' regime (after Aristotle) of events ordered by the logic of reason, narrative, and speech, and the 'aesthetic' regime (after Romanticism) which abolishes the hierarchical structures of the representational regime to privilege sensory effect, the immanent meaning of things in themselves, and the act of making art itself. In short, the 'representational' regime privileges *logos* over *pathos*, whilst for the 'aesthetic' regime it is the reverse.

On the one hand, the very invention of film materially realized the properly aesthetic definition of art, first elaborated in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, as a union of conscious and unconscious processes. On the other hand, however, film is an art of fiction that bestows a new youth on the genres, codes, and conventions of representation that democratic literarity had put into question (Rancière 2004: 5).

The 'aesthetic' regime complicates certain presumptions regarding historical representation. In Rancière's schema the Aristotelian system (from his *Poetics*) served to counteract the Platonic suspicion of images and the ends they are intended to serve. The point of 'poetry' is not that of authentic mimesis but to systematise intelligible structures. Its 'truth' is to be found in the logic of its causes and effects. This serves to champion poetry (or fiction) over history, which is at the mercy of the order of empirical events. The 'aesthetic' regime, says Rancière, 'plunged language

into the materiality of the traits by which the historical and social world becomes visible to itself' (Rancière 2004: 36). Art develops the operations of the descriptive, the traces and imprints of the empirical, the historical, of testimony and experience, as a system of signs: truth came from the revelation of things in themselves. The poetics of producing stories and history are entangled in the same arrangement of material signs and images. Narrative simply becomes defined according to its particular modes: the 'reactionary' restitution of genres, myths, or moral judgements; or the 'modernist' suspension of meaning in sense experience, existential subjectivity, or formal self-reflexivity. This latter suspension within the sensuous qualities, or intensities, of things founded in romanticism identifies a revolutionary silence at the heart of aesthetic expression and the 'aesthetic' regime.

In *Film Fables*, Rancière describes this tension between the image and its historical 'truths' in chapters on Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and Chris Marker's *The Last Bolshevik* (1993), another film that seeks to provide a revisionist account of the 'end of history', this time of the Soviet century, through the life of the film-maker Alexander Medvedkin. Both films operate systems of retrieval, amassing cinematic, photographic, literary, philosophical and art historical raw material and recombining, disassociating, singling out, enlarging and freeing it and then reconditioning that material with audio, text or video effects, to reconstruct and revise the century of cinema, of the shared community (a communism) of images and image-production, and to isolate the image as the minimal element of historical truth.

Histoire(s) isolates and extracts still frames and short fragmented sequences to return them to a natural history of flux, redeeming them from their complicity, as conscripted elements, in an ideological narrative. It is, Rancière claims, a poetics of pure presence that Godard accuses the cinema of having betrayed. The cinema failed to be present at the great catastrophes of the middle of the century; explicitly Auschwitz. Godard's voiceover declares, the 'flame of cinema went out at Auschwitz'. Cinema had failed to be present at the crime of the century because it had given itself over to the tyranny of industrial and ideological fiction. Of course, as Rancière makes clear, the validity of such claims is of rather less concern for the film's thesis than its provocation. The claim itself is essential to the film's modernist and apocalyptic paradigm of an end to the century of cinema; a destruction of the Babylon of cinema, a judgement and a prophesy. Through the montage of conflicting images and texts, multi-layered using the spectacular artifice of electronic video effects, Rancière finally identifies in Godard's task of redemption a fundamental

contradiction: that under the initial insistence on the purity of a pure presence is reinstated the rise of a 'new spiritualism, a new sacralization of the image and presence' through the triumph of videographic artifice and simulation. In attempting to demonstrate the cinema's betrayal of its 'vocation to presence' that was its proclaimed historical task, Godard in fact, verifies the inverse (Rancière 2006: 185).

For Rancière, however, a purity of presence is always already there in the mute images that the passive apparatus of cinema captures.

A cinematographic fiction is a specific linking of two kinds of sequences: those resolved according to an Aristotelian representational logic of assembled actions, and those left unresolved, lyrical sequences that suspend action, subtract themselves from the imperative of meaning, and offer a simple view of life in all its 'idiocy' and all its brute existence, without reason (in Garneau and Cisneros 2004: 119).

The real, a sense of presence, is not something that needs to be extracted and re-written by the voice. In calling for the redemption of the raw image Godard is missing the fact that the excess of signification that always inhabits the cinematic image was already there, already of its moment.

Likewise, Marker's aim is similarly a re-writing of history through the reinscription of the tissue-fragments of its historical images that are memorial images, since Marker's long-standing assertion has been that collective memory is the sum of a culture's *images* of itself. *The Last Bolshevik* narrates the life of Soviet film-maker Alexander Medvedkin, which, in Marker's narrative, runs in uncanny parallel with the Soviet century. Medvedkin's life moves from revolutionary films, through Stalinist propaganda, to a life dwindling and struggling to rediscover his earlier recognition, to an eventual death on the eve of *Perestroika*. Marker surrounds this biography with a range of archive images from the Soviet century: works by Medvedkin's contemporaries, early cinema newsreel and modern electronic news-gathering. He then re-writes these images and their meanings by instigating a didactic voice-over that reminds and insists on the meaning of images and their shadows and the duties of memory to remind us not to trust what we see. However, Marker appears less sceptical about trusting what we hear.

As Rancière points out, Marker merely traps himself within the problem of 'documentary' images – those images of cinematic origin that comprise a 'referential real' and an

'heterogeneity' of source material (Rancière 2006: 159). Cinema retrospection then, is free to play around with the consonance and dissonance between narrative voices, or with the series of period images, each with a different provenance and signifying power. It can join the power of the impression, the power of speech born from the meeting of the mutism of the machine and the silence of things, to the power of montage, in the broad, non-technical sense of the term, as that which constructs a story and a meaning by its self-proclaimed right to combine meanings freely, to re-view images, to arrange them differently, and to diminish or increase their capacity for expression and for generating meaning (Rancière 2006: 161).

Both *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and *The Last Bolshevik*, through their respective obsessions with the collective stories and memories of a Soviet century that is also a cinematic century, in the end betray the dilemma of a cinematic preoccupation with the disassembling and reassembling logic of montage as the essential site of meaning. Theirs is a foundation grounded on the shattering and reconstituting of signs; a contradictory nostalgia for image as truth at the very same time as such a truth is declared impossible.

Jacques Rancière, however, seeks to redress the balance from a preoccupation with the typological and foundational ground of montage to a privileging of the cinematic image that always already contains the contradictory means to disrupt its organisation. Michèle Garneau summarises the tension at work in every image and in the notion of the 'thwarted fable' by which Rancière seeks to characterise the cinema:

The experience of visibility so pivotal to film does not develop in opposition to its discursive and narrative structure, but because of it, in contradiction with it, by countering it. The two powers share their potentials within a relationship that is both collaborative and conflictual. Only when considered conjointly, Rancière maintains, can we grasp the conflict – now latent, now exploding with violence – that gives the cinema its force. This force of contradiction derives from the contrast between the closure of meaning and the openness to the visible (Garneau 2004: 110).

The tension between the closure of meaning and the openness of the visible is taken to its extreme in one further example put forward by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. He has remarked that the cinema could be 'made on the basis of images from cinema' (Agamben 1996: 70). Whilst

this may only appear to typify the post-modern cult of pastiche and irony, the continuation of classical genre and narrative or character archetypes, or more particularly, their resurgence in ever more technically spectacular forms, has for Agamben a distinct formula positioned in direct opposition to the forms of spectacle that was the central critique of Situationism. Specifically, Agamben comments on Guy Debord's rearrangement of the images of mass culture – advertising, fiction, newsreel, and so on – in his film *In Girum Imus Nocte Et Consumimur Igni* (1979); a technique of restitution and reinterpretation that pre-empts both *Histoire(s)* and *The Last Bolshevik*.

According to Agamben, Debord is drawn to the cinema precisely because of the historical character of its images. He claims, following Deleuze's semiotics of 'image-movements' that 'the image in cinema – and not only in cinema, but in modern times generally – is no longer something immobile. It is not an archetype, nor is it something outside history: rather, it is a cut that is itself mobile, an image-movement, charged with a dynamic tension. This is Benjamin's 'dialectical image', conceived in Agamben's interpretation, as a distinct element of historical experience. 'Historical experience is obtained by the image, and the images themselves are charged with history' (Agamben 1996: 69). However, this is a history conditioned by Benjamin's 'messianic' formulation; not merely the fragments of a chronological history but loaded with the eschatological couplet of judgement and salvation; of the redemption of the image from the catastrophe of historical narrative. Such is the rupture of montage.

Agamben argues that montage is the specific character of the cinema, and the 'transcendental' conditions of montage are '*repetition* and *stoppage*' (Agamben 1996: 70). Repetition, in the lengthy philosophical tradition of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Deleuze, does not express the return of the same but the restoration of 'the possibility of what was', or the re-inscription of memory into history as the possibility of thinking anew. At the same time, stoppage (again following Benjamin) is the 'revolutionary interruption' or the power to interrupt. It is stoppage that makes the cinema closer to the ideal of poetry than the narrative of prose to which plot-driven classical cinema is preferentially compared. Stoppage, in the poem, presents a disjunction between sound and meaning – a phrase borrowed from Paul Valéry: 'the poem, a prolonged hesitation between sound and meaning' (Agamben 1996: 70). Debord's technique, then, should be seen in the same manner, as 'a prolonged hesitation between image and meaning' in which stoppage wrenches the image away from its narrative sense to be exhibited in and for itself. The 'messianic task' that Agamben attributes to Debord's film, is the capacity to

‘de-create the real’ and take the image towards ‘imagelessness’, or to present the image *as image*, somehow stripped of its pre-determined signifying mode, leaving it signifying nothing ‘*except the fact that it is in the process of signifying*’ (Agamben 1996: 71 italics in original). Unlike Godard and Marker, Debord does not pronounce upon the images he extracts. Instead, he returns them to the ‘process of signifying’, which is reiterated by, and in fact depends upon, their suspension in imminence as effected by the palindromic title and the structure that effects a repeat, as a constant circulation of incomplete images. They withdraw meaning at the same time as they initiate and process it.

The history of the theory of montage is one in which the technique of montage itself takes on a philosophical and essentially redemptive character. Since acquiring a strategic function of narration or dialectics, after the initial accumulation of shots in an act of ‘showing’ during the ‘pre-narrative’ era, montage is acquired as a philosophical or political method. Moreover, this method is then integrated into a wider philosophical scepticism that Alberto Toscano describes, in which the striving for integration and synthesis becomes a separation in the wake of the Second World War. Here, claims Toscano, philosophy abdicates its role as an arbiter of transcendent truths and relocates itself in the mistrust of the images of the world, of representation and of meanings derived from things. This is the ‘crisis’ of philosophy’s ‘*critique of representation*’ (Toscano 2007: 181 italics in original).

We could almost say that it was by registering the ambient failure of traditional principles of *ordering* (somewhat hastily collected under this rubric of representation), and in trying to fashion new instruments of measurement and integration, that philosophy found itself obliged to aggravate its own crisis, and to do so by breathing a strange new life into that most (late) scholastic of terms, *ontology* (Toscano 2007: 181).

Montage as an essentially conceptual practice is then dependent on a principle of representation and either its synthesis or its disruption. However, a movement towards an ontological relation – something that Jean-Luc Nancy proposes when he configures each cinematic shot as a fragment of ‘sense’; an interrupting, ‘syncopating’ contact with the world that is itself part of an existence based on discontinuous experience – reclaims for cinema a relation with the world rather than simply with a currency of images or representations. Nancy’s interruption of myths, similar in

terms to Rancière's 'thwarted fable' and Agamben's '*process of signifying*', reclaims the shot, rather than the cut, as the primary aspect of cinematic practice: in effect, the act of 'looking' prior to the act of 'judging'.

In one final comment, Rancière raises the question that should the cinematic image need to be redeemed then it must have lost something, a perceptive power that must be returned to it (Rancière 2006: 111). It is in this final question, poised at the threshold of the possibility, or otherwise, of a redemptive practice for the cinema, that we turn to Nancy's more specific relation between 'world', 'sense', the 'fragment' and the cinema. In *The Sense of the World*, he argues that 'sense' emerges at the site where its traditional concepts are exhausted and all formulae for replacement are deemed ineffective or, worse, totalitarian. Poised between 'myth' and 'nihilism', or the absolute and the abyss of nothingness 'sense' emerges in fragments. He is adamant, however, that fragmentation must not succumb to an absolution, or nihilism, of the dialectical or causal – as it has in its modernist form in existence since Romanticism (Nancy 1997: 124). Instead, as Jeffrey Librett outlines in his introduction, the 'aesthetics of fragmentation' 'has remained excessively bound up with an absolute totality of which each fragmentary and relative work has functioned, in its very autonomy, as a synecdochic mirror image' (in Nancy 1997: xvii) – a point we might extend to the open-ended structures of modernist cinema (aside from the closed structures of classical narrative) that articulate their fragmentary, sequential narratives as either self-reflexive meditations on the operation of image production or the existential reification of the subject.

Nancy's response is to argue for a continuation of fragmentation that initiates not conceptual ends but an endlessly incomplete relation of parts brought into presence:

The 'fractality' with which we will have to do from this point on – and which fragmentation also announced – is quite different. Instead of the ambiguous end of the fragment, it is a matter of the fraying of the edges of its trace [*son frayage*]. It is a matter of the frayed access [*l'accès frayed*] to a presentation, to a coming into presence – and by way of this coming into presence. [...] What makes up 'world' and 'sense' can no longer be determined as a given, accomplished, 'finished' presence but is intermingled with the coming, the in-finity of a coming into presence, or of an *e-venire* (Nancy 1997: 126).

This ‘fractality’ provokes the question of what remains when absolute and relative, myth and nihilism, the whole or the fragment have been exhausted.

The event is not a ‘taking-place’: it is the incommensurability of coming to all taking-place, the incommensurability of spacing and fraying [*frayage*] to all space disposed in the present of a presentation (Nancy 1997: 126).

Despite the elusiveness of Nancy’s phrasing, we might begin to locate this process of ‘spacing and fraying’ within the reoriented view of the films set out here. In each case, they do not seek to encapsulate the ‘taking-place’ of any event or condition. In a further sense, the historical aspect of montage that has appeared consistently in theoretical discourse is reconfigured – as Nancy says of historicism qua metaphysics – away from the movement towards completion, or a retrospective analysis, and towards the exhaustion of the possibility of defining an end point. As examples, both *The Asthenic Syndrome* and *Palms*, by virtue of their responses to the immediacy of the socio-political conditions within which they were produced, realise only the assemblage of elements consequentially partial and incomplete: selected traces of their milieu. *Elephant* and *Last Days*, each recall a single event, but not through the causality of what took place but as the overlapping, shifting moments that testify to the dissipation of ‘reasons’ for each violent event. Ulrich Seidl’s *Import Export*, contains at its centre a perpetual ‘taking-place’ – that of the existent border between Austria and Slovakia – to present simply the ‘fraying’ of its conceptual and symbolic status. Furthermore, the ‘taking-place’ of this fragmentation relates between films, from one to the other, as a persistent refusal of completeness. The form in which this presentation and incompleteness relates to the possibility of redemption – aesthetic or conceptual – requires a realignment of the terms of the real.

CHAPTER 4

Cinematic Realism and the Mystery of Redemption

Where the films of Godard and Marker seek to redeem the images of the past with a retrospective ‘truth’ via the use of montage, a consistent theme throughout the history of film theory has sought to locate images of truth in the act of filming. It is a theme that circulates around the contingency and separation of the fictional and the real, the predetermined and the revelatory. Key theorists of post-war cinematic realism such as André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer claimed a totalising, unifying ‘real’ world as the ground of all fictions. Subsequent theorists, notably Paul Schrader and Gilles Deleuze, reconfigured the real into a metaphysics of experience described as either ‘transcendental’ or ‘immanent’ respectively, but remained within a formula for reinstating a belief in the mystery of the world by opposing an instrumental rationality of images and its logic of representation.

Central to these theories remained a sense of ‘defilement’ of the real in modernity and a separation of a pure experience from that which is reified in the tainted mythologies of commodified fiction. It is this purity of the real that had to be redeemed, the perceptual authenticity that, as Rancière says, has been lost and must be returned. These are the redemptive, even utopian, aspects of the real in modernity. Moreover, these theories continue to espouse the separation between a materialist, essentialist or immanent real and its subjective, perceptual viewer.

This chapter aims to follow this thread, paying particular attention to Bazin, Kracauer, Schrader and Deleuze, in order to locate the real within this modernist configuration of an existential and phenomenological experience. The purpose of this background is to set the terms within and against which Jean-Luc Nancy’s particular kind of realism can be located, in particular what Ian James calls Nancy’s ‘post-phenomenological’ (James 2006: 219) expression of ‘sense’. As already sketched out in Chapter Two, Nancy’s description of ‘sense’ provides a formula for a realism and an experience of the world that retains a relationship of the material and the ideative, the physical and the spiritual, the transcendental and the empirical through the exposure of discontinuous fragments of ‘sense’. The artwork, or specifically the shots within a film as well as film as a whole, offers fragments of and exposures to the world as it is sensed. The symbols of

established meanings and the excesses and suspensions of that meaning together form a 'transimmanent' sense. The images of the world are then presented as discontinuous fragments simultaneously revealing and withdrawing meaning rather than conforming or self-reflexively disrupting traditional orders of representation. Where representation always ultimately identifies a 'destination' or a 'limit' to meaning, an exposure to fragments of 'sense' *presents* the limit situation of a real, or world, as it is 'taking place' (Nancy 1993: 2).

(i) Wim Wenders, André Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer: the lost real

The crux of traditional cinematic realism opposes the contingency of the real and its necessary disruption of, or intervention within, the fictive, with the fictive, itself, as a heightened recognition of the real world. The former, built on the possibilities of duration and immersion, drives the theories of Bazin and Kracauer; the latter, paying greater attention to the disruptions and gaps within duration, is focused on Schrader and Deleuze. Both aspects present themselves in an exchange that takes place between Wim Wenders and Werner Herzog in Wenders' 1983 film, *Tokyo-Ga*, his meditation on the Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu and the possibility of finding the essence of Ozu's films within the radically altered fabric of modern Tokyo. The two directors of New German Cinema lament the loss of 'pure' images in a world overwhelmed by commodifying image production. Both, in their own ways, express a desire to reconnect with images drawn from the real world to counteract the unfaithful representations of commercial fiction. In his film narration, Wenders contrasts the 'forgery of emotion' he finds in the images of an in-flight movie with the view from the aeroplane window: 'If only it were possible to film like that [...] the way you sometimes open your eyes. Just looking, not trying to prove anything' (Wenders 1991: 61).

Ultimately, Wenders proclaims the possibility of locating a real or 'pure' image in the fragments of the quotidian or everyday events of the city, in fleeting glimpses of eternal human gestures or the atmospherics of light and shade that transcend the historical ravages of Tokyo's hyper-modernisation. By contrast, Herzog is adamant that 'the simple truth is that there aren't many images around now' (in Wenders 1991: 64). 'Pure' images require extreme measures; a desire for something like an originary moment in which the pure image is discovered in the absolutely prime, the never before witnessed. For Herzog it is a matter of bearing witness to the unwitnessed. He proclaims it necessary to enter war zones, climb mountains or visit the depths of

the oceans or outer space: a wager that, to some extent, he fulfilled in later works such as *Lessons of Darkness* (1992) and *The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005). A look from Wenders' perspective will locate the terms for a closer examination of Bazin and Kracauer; whilst Herzog's formula for an 'ecstatic truth' (in Cronin 2002: 301) will open up discussion of Schrader and Deleuze.

In *Tokyo-Ga* Wenders speculates on an ambiguous relation with reality in the cinema suggesting that 'reality' is already 'corrupted' on account of the intervention of an inevitable human subjectivity, and yet he insists that there must still be a reality (Wenders 1991: 63). Some years later, in *Until the End of the World* (1991), Wenders conceptually suggests that the images of the subconscious, extracted by science directly from the brain, would be like a sickness, a toxic experience cut loose from external reality. In *Tokyo-Ga*, he emphasises a gulf between the cinema and 'life' such that 'it's become a rarity in today's cinema for [...] moments of truth to take place, for people and things to show themselves as they are' (Wenders 1991: 63); though in the end he claims to find it in the sight of an intransigent young boy on the platform of the Tokyo metro being dragged along by his overburdened mother: a fleeting glimpse of the quotidian passage of everyday Tokyo that recalls the stubborn, rebellious children common to Ozu's films, yet more so, the reality of life's authenticity that he believes such images in Ozu's film's ultimately convey. Wenders's presentation of 'reality' circulates continuously around the contingent as it may or may not enter the narrative space of the cinema. These external fragments of uncontrolled, undisciplined reality that puncture the surface 'reality' of any filmed narrative are the substance of a truth and a purity of image that retains a contact between the cinema and the world, or 'life'.

Catherine Russell has argued that this question, of the 'impossible reconciliation' of the images of reality and those of cinematic narrative, has formed the crux of Wenders's cinema: that a cinematic realism that lies outside of psychological narrative keeps alive the possibility of a realist cinema 'free of narrative constraints' (Russell 1995: 94). Wenders codified a three-stage typology of images that he called the 'grammatical', the 'profound' and the 'found'. The 'grammatical' are those images necessary for the articulation of narrative, those that orchestrate action and reaction and are the currency of all films. The 'profound' are those images personal to Wenders, images of locations, events, gestures witnessed and consigned to memory for re-use and re-formulation in a film. The 'found' are those images discovered or chanced upon whilst shooting, such as locations or the atmospherics or the gestures or effects of actors or backgrounds that only make themselves apparent in post-production (in Russell 1995: 93).

Each of these modes is exemplified in the director's 1982 film, *The State of Things*. The film is structured in three distinct parts: the first, a short sequence from a post-apocalyptic science fiction story replete with the cinematic genre's recognisable tropes: a desert landscape, technological obsession, family trauma and heroic self-sacrifice. The second part suspends this fiction as the genre film is forced to halt production for financial reasons and, thereafter, the film proceeds as an observational document of the cast and crew quite literally killing time – eating, sleeping, bathing and waiting for the production to restart. In the third and final section, the overarching plot is restored as the fictional director returns to Los Angeles in search of the film's errant producer, who, in a restoration of genre, is on the run from loan sharks. The director and producer embark on a dialogue that argues the dichotomy between images of 'life' and those of dramatic fiction, littered with references to *film noir*, and conceptually configured as an opposition of a European *auteur* and a 'Hollywood' producer. Finally both men are shot dead by unseen assailants. The final images of the film are those from the director's Super-8 camera continuing to depict its dislocated point-of-view of the empty car park where it and the director have fallen.

In Russell's analysis, the director's death is the 'apotheosis of the "grammatical image"' (Russell 1995: 103), locked into the motif of death that is both central and inevitable in the wider context of post-war modernist cinema. Death is the only means to end any narrative based on 'life', on an existential experience of being-towards-death as the conceptual ground formulated in opposition to the 'divine grace' of classical plot mechanics that forever bestow the 'happy' or 'just' ending. Thereafter, the coda of the continuous point-of-view from the Super-8 camera, freed from the eye of its now dead director, belies the contradiction at the heart of Wenders's 'found' image. It is within this final sequence, rather than in the lengthy, 'waiting' segment, that the tensions and contradictions of Wenders's position are most acutely located. When the camera falls from the murdered director's grasp it continues to record *as if* it were a 'found image', a fragment of the reality of the empty car park, no longer sutured to the point-of-view of the dead director, a character in a fiction, but still that of the living director: Wenders himself. The redemption of the real as 'found' fragment of the rolling camera offers an image of a reality (just as the fictional director has been seen to argue for) freed from the determinations of its 'grammatical' function: the real recuperated by the continuation beyond the death of the filming subject (Russell 1995: 101). However, the very fact that it must be re-inscribed into a narrative of death undermines the lengthy middle section of the film in which a more radically abstracted

mortality is played out as a document of the mere passing of time. The final segment reiterates the problem that says that any realism must inevitably be aligned with subjectivity: 'consciousness is privileged over empirical reality' (Russell 1995: 101). In the end, argues Russell, Wenders's attempts to survive the death-drive of narrative with the 'found image' of a reality beyond consciousness betrays a kind of romanticism: 'he can only do so by insisting on the status of the image as a subjective phenomenon, and the very substance of artistic vision' (Russell 1995: 102).

More broadly, Russell incorporates Wenders into the theme of a European post-war modernism, similarly expressed by both Godard and Deleuze, and defined in the binary of an American-European opposition. Moreover, this theme circulates around the motif of mortality as a 'violent means of condemning "closure" as a narrative and historical event' (Russell 1995: 3). Given over to self-reflexivity, it becomes an 'ironic representation'; where once film theory was configured on a binary opposition of 'realism' and 'illusion', in modernity 'realist discourse [...] knows itself to be dead. It can no longer deny its status as mechanical reproduction, but neither can it abandon the "real" of photographic indexicality' (Russell 1995: 15). Russell argues that post-war modernism is reliant on the contingency implicit in a form of '*documentary* realism' (Russell 1995: 97, original in italics) with its essential, existential sense of the loss of meaning. Wenders is compared to André Bazin, for whom also, 'mortality and representation are the means by which consciousness is at once threatened and preserved in its ideal status as identity' – the viewing subject as active participant able to redeem the image through existential reflection. Likewise, Godard, allied with Walter Benjamin, also seeks a redemptive aspect in the indexical 'real' that carries with it the singularity of historical experience that is a 'critique of loss, recovery, and return' (Russell 1995: 13). A realist ontology of the cinema, such as Wenders', proposes a ground from which the viewing subject can formulate thought, concept, or even in the religiously inflected terms used by André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer, 'spirituality'. In each case, a phenomenological influence fixes the 'real' as duration and contingency in opposition to a fictive idealism; it represents a 'real' that breaks the surface or ruptures the fictive to authenticate a unity of being (or in Deleuze's case, a flux of becoming, as will be seen). However, in each case, this unity opposes the instrumental effects of modernity that gives over to the modernist perpetuation of the state of death, loss or ruin and therefore, represents the limit or the destination of meaning against which the subject is necessarily defined.

In two studies, *European Film Theory and Cinema: An Introduction* (2001) and *Realist Film Theory and Cinema: The Nineteenth-century Lukácsian and Intuitionist Realist and Modernist Tradition* (2006), Ian Aitken has sought to place cinematic realism within the broader historical context of artistic and literary realism and its relation to modernity. He identifies the link between the phenomenologically realist theories of Bazin and Kracauer and modernity as one of confrontation: they both sought to challenge the prevailing forces of instrumental rationality, a term developed by Max Weber and used in pervasive and universal terms by Adorno and Horkheimer. Aitken notes that whilst other ‘realist’ theorists of the first half of the twentieth century, notably John Grierson and Georg Lukács, are identified with a more idealist and politically didactic sentiment, Bazin and Kracauer stand out for their phenomenological and ontological arguments.

Aitken traces Bazin’s early philosophical influences to theorists of the French Catholic existentialist persuasion, in particular Emmanuel Mounier who attempted to provide the more nihilistic aspects of existentialism found in Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger with an optimistic spin drawn from theological sources (Aitken 2006: 173). Likewise, the protestant literary and film critic Roger Leenhardt is also cited by Aitken as a key influence on Bazin. He was another theorist who made regular recourse to the Christian view of humanity as essentially ‘fallen’ and therefore in need of redemption in the context of a dehumanising, depersonalising, that is modernising, world. Aitken points to Bazin’s concerns with the depersonalisation of modern experience and argues these are reminiscent of themes expressed by Henri Bergson, whose turn of the century theories placed duration at the core of the human condition (Aitken 2006: 173) but in a manner that differed from that of the principle phenomenologist of the time, Edmund Husserl. Aitken suggests that for the latter it was the immediate experience of the ‘life-world’ (the *Lebenswelt*) that provided the prerequisite for the human being to evolve as subjects. For Bergson, a greater degree of human intentionality was immediately necessary to locate the human being in the midst of the endless ‘flux’ of matter that constituted the world – what he identified as ‘instinct’ (Aitken 2006: 174). Standing in the way of *élan vital* – the ever-evolving flux of all life that includes within it human consciousness – was modernity, with its scientific compartmentalisation of this flux and its hegemonic tendency to disrupt, halt and eliminate duration in favour of distinct and quantifiable units (Aitken 2006: 175). The consequence of this was that human experience lost its fundamental relationship with duration and flux and with a ‘suprational reflection’ that is replaced by an ‘abstracted’ form of experience.

The combination of these factors leads Bazin, in his essay 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' (1945), to put forward the thesis that human existence is caught within a temporal experience of decay, which returns in the form of the 'mummy complex', the apparently constant human need to preserve the human being against the inevitability of death – whether through the means of ritual, religion, art, or technology.

However, Bazin is highly critical of a naïve form for realism that simply equates the image with a mirror reflection or rendering of 'reality': this 'resemblance complex' is in fact the 'original sin' of Western art (Bazin 1971a: 13). The 'mummy complex' is also recognised as an artificial construct in its bid to resist the passage of time and decay. In this respect, Bazin adopts some of the more pessimistic views of the existentialist tradition. It is through the cinema that he attempts to grasp the more optimistic aspects, through the relationship between the unified fragments of cinematic shots and the subjective position of the spectator, recognising, not the singular, distinct sections of a constructivist montage with its instrumental grammar, but (through the recognition of the flow – *durée* – with all its indeterminacy) the means to realise the experience of of life as 'successiveness without distinction' (Bazin 1971a: 9).

Bazin remains focused on a totality of experience in the cinematic image, an experience that transcends the individual parts and the logical articulation of successive cause and effect. Such a limited structure of articulation points to the limits and limitations of a fractured human condition. Bazin is searching for an impression that is closer to the existential desire for a unifying gathering of experience into a whole. Cinema is best placed to achieve this, not through the articulation of individual units of a pre-determined world and events but through, firstly, the photographic reproduction of an always already recognisable external reality, and, secondly, the sequential images of duration that can present an integrated flow that, also, always already links past, present and future.

It was this essentially totalising field of vision, with its apparent implication of a 'transcendental subject' as the root of vision, that lay at the heart of the structuralist and semiotic criticism of Bazin in the 1970s. Bazin's theories retain this link between the indexical cinematic image and a meaningful, unified 'reality'. Jean Mitry objected that the camera's automatic registration of a given 'reality' does not necessarily provide for an objective and impartial image of that reality (in Bazin 1971a: 6), but Bazin's thesis was never quite so simple. Crucial to his argument was the role of the spectator as a subject incorporated into the cinematic text as active

agent, filling in gaps and integrating an existential impression of totality through the continuous spans of temporality set down in the passage of the film's narrative. Bazinian cinematic realism expresses a faith in forms that remain close to the perceptual experience of the world. It proclaims the perceptual experience of the cinema to resemble the existential experience of the spectator's life-experience. Such familiarity with the image on the screen enables the spectators to feel an analogous relation to experienced reality. It gives scope for them to seek a totality of experience from the fractured, fragmented experience of the sequential scenes as free agents, not recipients of a pre-determined representation structured by the film. In this respect, Bazin's formula is heavily dependent on the indeterminacy and transience of a realistic physical setting – a feature that led him to embrace the Italian 'Neo-Realists' with such enthusiasm. However, familiarity is only part of the equation. When writing of Neo-Realism Bazin is prepared to take this relation beyond the empirical and to imbue this familiarity with a religiosity, using terms such as 'faith', 'love' and 'grace' (Bazin 1971b).

A key distinction between the cinematic realism of Bazin and that of Siegfried Kracauer concerns a film's present context. For Bazin, the cinematic totality rests on the relationship between the film's conceptual diegesis – its characterisation, action, location, visualisation – and the 'peripheral visual data' which are on hand in the scene; that is the scope of coincidental, momentarily present elements that creep into the scene, a kind of atmospherics of the moment – a perspective echoed by Wenders. Kracauer, by contrast, was inclined to a cinematic totality that consisted in the successive interrelations of a film's content with references to elements of the world existing beyond that content (Kracauer 1970: 303).

Bazin's enthusiasm for the indeterminate within the frame, for the intersection of drama flooded by worldly elements exterior to that drama, was epitomised in the stylistic importance given to the lengthy sequence shot over the short, fragmentary montage sequence exemplified by the controlling methodology of Soviet montage. Duration becomes central to the shot, providing for the contemplative and immersive involvement of the spectator.

Overall, Bazin seeks to transcend the problems that modernity, through its instrumental rationality and functional accounting, places on the broader existential and phenomenological nature of human experience. This attempt to transcend leads him to maintain certain metaphysical points of reference and fall back into forms of theological rhetoric. He writes of Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (1950):

probably for the first time, the cinema gives us a film in which the only genuine incidents, the only perceptible movements are those of the life of the spirit. Not only that, it also offers us a new dramatic form, that is specifically religious – or better still, specifically theological; a phenomenology of salvation and grace (Bazin 1971a: 182).

The elevation of non-dramatic incidents, drawn from a familiarity with the empirical world and bound with the passage of perceptible movements, eschews psychological analysis. The symbolic and the real come together – analogous to Christ's stations of the cross – providing 'theological values' but defying explanation (Bazin 1971a: 135).

In seeking out a totality to unify the existential and phenomenological world opened up to the camera Bazin is forced to describe what is presented in ultimately onto-theological terms. Siegfried Kracauer, however, attempted to locate the transcendent or totalising possibility of cinematic realism in a purely secular phenomenological *Lebenswelt*.

Kracauer saw in the cinema the possibility of a realism that could expose the limitations and 'disenchantment' of modernity. He developed the terms of 'abstraction', 'distraction' and 'disenchantment' from the sociological theories of Max Weber, who argued that disenchantment was the result of the diminishing of metaphysical or utopian values in modernity due to its instrumental systems of management controlled by capital's ruling structures. Kracauer, likewise, argued that 'abstraction' results when the immediate experience of the physical environment as a whole is depleted and turned into abstract commodity values, and distraction follows because cultural experience lacks any genuine substance and therefore leads to a 'distracted' form of spectatorship and consumption (Aitken 2006: 154).

Along with Weber Kracauer was influenced by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Husserl. He argued that in modernity a form of 'lawless freedom' permeates aesthetic practice, debasing Kant's original view that the imagination should be integrally related to a critical understanding. He also endorsed Husserl's phenomenological account of the 'life-world', or *Lebenswelt*, which stressed the world of immediate subjective experience ('a complexity of satisfactions, discords, wants and pursuits which often lie below the conceptual and the conscious', Aitken 2006: 157). To counter the alienation caused by such disenchantment, Kracauer developed a realist aesthetic under the terms of the 'Redemption of Physical Reality', in which he saw the possibility of

bringing the individual into closer proximity with the realities of the physical world that had been obscured by the mass ornamentation of modernity (Kracauer 1970: 300).

His belief was that the means to fully grasp the experience of the 'real', to appreciate a sense of the human condition outside of the influence of instrumental rationality, could not be fully achieved. Access to the experience of a physical, empirical *Lebenswelt* – the sphere of immediate perceptual experience – was denied by that influence. Husserl's phenomenological *Lebenswelt* combined a subjective relativity with an always already existing communality (a being-with-others), and must be experienced as a totality that is perceived largely through intuition. In simplified terms, Husserl sought to give greater weight to the evidence of experience than to the products of 'abstract' forms of conceptual enquiry. This Kracauer adopts as the means to escape from the limitations of modernity's reductive rationality through the immediate experience of the world in phenomenological terms. This transcendence leads Kracauer to use the indeterminate term 'redemption'. It is worth recalling the emphasis Stephen Mulhall gives to this word, however: it does not imply a moral or technical perfection, or a systematic or reasoned improvement, but remains enigmatic. It need not be founded on the attainability of some mystical or divine intervention (salvation or grace) but through the recognition that such a condition is indeed necessary. Such is the sense by which Kracauer asserts redemption, inspired by a revelatory awareness achievable through close scrutiny of physical conditions and a resistance to rationalising frameworks. Nevertheless, his recourse to the elusive terminology of 'redemption', 'belief' and 'spiritual life' gained through a secular appropriation of the theological that is then collapsed into a phenomenological 'life-world' of immediate experience remains difficult to qualify; its terms are dependent on an implied access to an undefined 'spiritual' rather than 'corporeal' life (Kracauer 1970: xi). He returns to origins, citing the films of the Lumière Company: 'a jumble of transient, forever dissolving patterns accessible only to the camera' (Kracauer 1970: 81). Nevertheless, his realism is not that of a naïve verisimilitude, but of a phenomenological recognition that allows for, and circulates around, a greater degree of exposure to the 'flow of material life' (Kracauer 1970: 300) that presents a greater autonomy than the determined and determining factors of either a classically realist narrative or a heavily symbolist formalism. Kracauer is determined to resist films that present themselves as self-contained entities in the sense of presenting an aesthetic whole. Films should contain diegetic 'gaps' within them.

Kracauer did not seek to replace existing film theories with a new model but to accentuate the importance of ‘material evidence’ (Kracauer 1970: 304). Gertrud Koch neatly summarises the overall theory:

Kracauer’s theory of film can be subdivided analytically into three components or areas, namely a *sensualist* aesthetics (adumbrated by means of an analytic of the spectator), a philosophy of the real based on an *existential ontology* (whereby existence is taken as the domain of referential objects), and a redemptive figure based on an *aesthetics of reconciliation* (which Kracauer roots in the specifics of film as a medium) (Koch 2000: 106).

In a form that bears similarity with Wenders’ ‘profound’ image – that which is acknowledged and returned – Koch describes Kracauer’s use of the Medusa myth in reference to the confrontation of history’s atrocities: ‘we do not, and cannot, see actual horrors because they paralyze us with blinding fear; and [...] we shall know what they look like only by watching images of them which reproduce their true appearance’ (Kracauer 1970: 305). In the end, though, Kracauer’s form of redemption is overly dependent on a visual primacy and the need for the image to maintain a concrete relation to the extant object. As such, it is destined to failure with respect to any event that fails to leave a ‘visual mnemonic trace’ (Koch 2000: 113).

For both Bazin and Kracauer, the real could be the means to access something elusively ‘spiritual’. Kracauer writes in the preface to *Theory of Film*:

Perhaps the way today leads from, and through, the corporeal to the spiritual? And perhaps the cinema helps us to move from ‘below’ to ‘above?’ It is indeed my contention that film, our contemporary, has a definite bearing on the era into which it is born; that it meets our innermost needs precisely by exposing – for the first time, as it were – outer reality and thus deepening, in Gabriel Marcel’s words, our relation to ‘this Earth which is our habitat’ (Kracauer 1970, xi).

At the same time, this statement betrays an overly totalising formula for the real, and for the cinema, one that is less engaged with content than a particular approach to *mise-en-scène* and a

direct link to the contingent and the everyday details of existence. It is equally reliant on a visual reality for which it is difficult to relate those aspects of experience – such as might be described as ‘evil’ or ‘sinful’ – that are without recourse to acts. In the end Kracauer relies – as Wim Wenders continued to – on a unified real world based on essential truths that redeems an existential life experience through the restitution or recognition of a primordial, pre-symbolic state.

(ii) Werner Herzog, Paul Schrader, Gilles Deleuze: the mysterious real

In contrast to the redeeming characteristics of a unified and totalising real world behind the fiction, Werner Herzog argues for a ‘pure’ image that speaks first and foremost of an ‘ecstatic truth’, a truth that is ‘mysterious and elusive’ (in Cronin 2002: 301). Despite Herzog’s claim that such an ‘ecstatic truth’ must be accessed through ‘poetic’ means, by ‘fabrication and imagination and stylization’ (in Cronin 2002: 301), his relationship to the real is crucial, and crucially different from that of Wenders and those who seek to find the ‘pure’ image in the singular, contingent moment that breaks the surface of a fictive narration. Herzog has played out this confusion in a consistent body of work that stretches the traditional boundaries between documentary and fiction. This notorious ambiguity is reflected in key works such as *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972) and *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) and even more so in those ‘documentary’ films that bear witness to the extremities of their filming situations, notably *La Soufrière* (1976), *Lessons of Darkness* (1992) and *The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005).

In *Lessons of Darkness*, images of the burning oil fields of Kuwait in the immediate aftermath of the First Gulf War are narrated as the imaginary visitation by an alien race to a post-apocalyptic Earth, replete with text from the Biblical *Revelations*. Similarly, *The Wild Blue Yonder* re-imagines scientific imagery filmed both in outer space and from beneath the polar ice caps as the images of an alien race’s failed attempts to establish their civilisation on Earth. Just as Herzog had conflated the images of mirages in the desert with a Mayan creation myth in *Fata Morgana* (1970), so he immerses the images of the world in the ‘images’ of the cosmic, the mythic, the sacred, rhetorically hauling the ‘real’ as photographically evidenced into a dialogue with the concept of the sublime. Herzog’s films continually present the idea of the immense, the transcendent, the cosmic – something like the sheer abyss of the natural world – and combine it with an imagery staked in the unique but factual, an act of witnessing that seeks to refute all logical, reasonable

modes of exposition. The hallucinatory delusions of transcendence and visionary hubris, the constant turning on myths of creation and apocalyptic rebirth, continually fail to match the sublimity of bare life, the bare evidence, of the images of an existent world. Rather than a romantic sublime, aimed at an expression of the infinite, Herzog's is closer to the sublime or mysterious evoked by the presentation of the sheer inability to comprehend beyond looking.

This limit situation of the mysterious or the ineffable points us in the direction of Paul Schrader and Gilles Deleuze, two later theorists who developed aspects of the real in relation to the effects of the 'transcendent' and the 'immanent'.

Paul Schrader proposed a 'transcendental style', detectable through certain formal characteristics configured around the rupture of a realist mode of address to express the 'transcendent' or effects 'beyond normal sense experience' (Schrader 1972: 5). He distils this 'transcendental style' into the relation between a realist representation, what he calls an 'everydayness' formed from recognisable and unexceptional moments of recognisable reality, and moments of 'disparity' that inexplicably rupture this prosaic normality (Schrader 1972: 160).

Schrader begins by considering the contentious development of the term 'transcendent' as it has been applied both theologically and to works of art, arguing that since art works are human works they cannot inform about the transcendent, they can only be expressive of it. Such terms then lead directly to the examples of the films of Ozu and Robert Bresson that link the inexplicable and the spiritual to the real of what is readily and necessarily apparent: 'The proper function of transcendental art is, therefore, to express the Holy itself (the Transcendent), and not to express or illustrate holy feelings' (Schrader 1972: 7). The style is prefigured on the possibility of presenting a 'spiritual truth' by combining the look of an objective image drawn from the world against another without recourse to logical, rational or psychological terms. There is a kind of asceticism at work in such a formula: the transcendent is glimpsed through the distillation of experience, of action and reaction, into minimal terms. Detailing camerawork, editing and performance, Schrader highlights the 'nonexpressive', thereby 'robbing the conventional interpretations of reality their relevance and power' (Schrader 1972: 11). He contrasts a sparse verisimilitude, what he calls 'the everyday' with a dislocating application of the cut – devoid of external (narrative or spatial logic) and internal (psychological logic) – and called 'disparity' (Schrader 1972: 39-42).

Realism is a stylisation rather than a naïve verisimilitude. In the first place, the ‘everyday’ is given as ‘*a meticulous representation of the dull, banal commonplaces of everyday living*’ (Schrader 1972: 39 italics in original). The ‘everyday’ is said to reject all the ‘biased interpretations of reality’ (Schrader 1972: 39): that is, the traditional modes of classical realism for which ‘reality’ is a determined accentuation of symbolic, subjective, expressionistic or plot-motivated images. ‘Reality’, then, is rendered inexpressive, ‘cold’, and baring only the rudimentary configuration of objects of naturalism.

The everyday celebrates the bare threshold of existence, those banal occurrences which separate the living from the dead, the physical from the material, those occurrences which so many people equate with life itself (Schrader 1972: 39).

Schrader endorses Robert Bresson’s description of the everyday in film as a ‘surface-aesthetics’ (Schrader 1972: 62). It is not a ‘documentary “truth” of an event (the *cinéma-vérité*)’ (Schrader 1972: 63), or a rationalised, interpretative view, but merely the appearance of surfaces, isolated (as shots) from each other, minimalising or resisting immediate articulation of meaning.

Disparity is identified as ‘*an actual or potential disunity between man and his environment*’ (Schrader 1972: 42 italics in original). Schrader states, at this point, that disunity ‘*culminates in a decisive action*’ (Schrader 1972: 42 italics in original), appearing to suggest a plot point or an ‘inciting incident’ as he concedes. However, he distinguishes the ‘transcendental style’ from classical narrative through a sense of its ‘touching the transcendent ground of being’ through sudden and unexpected emotional expression, solemnity, suffering, agony; each abruptly breaking the ‘surface’ of the everyday, but dislocated and unmotivated by environment or ‘humane instinct’ (Schrader 1972: 43). This disparity is said to disturb the logic of relations to invite discomfort, dread or awe. In short, ‘[d]isparity is the paradox of the spiritual existing within the physical, and it cannot be “resolved” by any earthly logic or human emotions’ (Schrader 1972: 82).

He adds a third, final, element to the ‘transcendental style’, that of ‘stasis’: ‘a frozen view of life which does not resolve the disparity but transcends it’ (Schrader 1972: 49). This ‘quiescent view of life’ (Schrader 1972: 49), deduced again from both Ozu and Bresson, re-establishes the totality of being, or existential experience. It is neither ineffable nor mysterious, reconciliatory

nor memorialising, it is the everyday once again expressed as surface, as inexpressive, unwilling being.

He identifies a famous scene in Ozu's *Late Spring* (1950): the shot of a static vase interjects with the images of a daughter, her sleeping father, and the daughter erupting into tears. He argues '[t]he vase is stasis, a form which can accept deep, contradictory emotion and transform it into an expression of something unified, permanent, transcendent' (Schrader 1972: 49). For Schrader, expressing the 'transcendent' is a matter of form, one that evokes a universal affect, where 'the human forms of expression are transcended by a universal form of expression' (Schrader 1972: 86).

In this way André Bazin's historiological deployment of the sacred and profane is reversed. In the essay 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', he had argued that photography, and by extension the cinema, had freed painting from the 'original sin' of Western art, of attempting to recreate a copy of the world through an obsession with likeness (Bazin 1971a 12). The indexical image of the cinema, always already and passively bearing the mark of the real, had 'canonized the human, sensual and profane' (Schrader 1972: 158). It was abundant with the imitative, experiential and existential. It could automatically produce 'instant empathy' (Schrader 1972: 158). Bazin claimed that from the earliest 'sacred' artefacts of primitive art to the cinematic image, there was a steady profanation of the arts. Schrader claims that in the case of 'transcendental style', in the hands of directors such as Ozu and Bresson, the cinema became instead 'progressively sacred' (Schrader 1972: 158). It begins with the abundance of the 'everyday' which it ruptures through the 'disparity' of dislocated events and then transcends through a formal rather than rational or motivated stasis (Schrader 1972: 159). It therefore presents the formal codes of 'mystery' accessed through the mute affect of images: 'Transcendental style can bring us nearer to that silence, that invisible image, in which the parallel lines of religion and art meet and interpenetrate' (Schrader 1972: 169).

Schrader maintains that a 'spiritual' effect, in terms of a cinematic style, is not determined by religious themes. It is the identification of a set of formal characteristics for expressing the 'mysterious' as human experience; hence, it can cross cultural boundaries, linking the minimalism of Ozu and the spiritualism of 'zen' with Bresson's themes of body/soul duality and the turmoil of predestination and free will, whilst Carl-Theodor Dreyer is said to express the fantastic and the miraculous. The 'transcendental style' is the form, immanent to the cinema, that is able to express

the transcendent or the 'mysterious'. However, for Gilles Deleuze (responding to Schrader), '[t]here is no need at all to call on a transcendence' (Deleuze 2005b: 17) since it is possible to re-write the 'transcendent' as a form of time-image that brings the mysterious back under the sign of the immanent.

Deleuze recalls Schrader's example from Ozu's *Late Spring*, that of the vase interposed between 'a daughter's half smile and the beginning of her tears'. Whilst such a link may speak through the logic of ellipsis, for Deleuze it represents a special type of 'opsign' ('making time and thought perceptible'). He is drawn to the image of the vase, as what he calls a 'still-life'. It is, he claims, the moment when the cinema is most like the photograph and most radically distinct from it. Moreover, a still-life composition in the cinema is imbued with a fixed duration and with duration comes a particular consciousness of time, of being *in* time (Deleuze 2005b: 16). Time itself does not change but change occurs in time. The use of the still-life in Ozu's cinema is identified with the initial rupture in the transition from the movement-image to the time-image. The still-life presents 'a little time in the pure state' (Deleuze 2005b: xii). As a pure time-image, it encapsulates all of the chaos of the world, that is the dynamic flux of chaos and cosmos that is central to Deleuze's broader ontological concerns, and that can be traced back to the 'chaosmos' of *The Logic of Sense* (Deleuze 2004: 201). The still-life, which may seem a picture of order and stasis, presents a window onto time, a moment in isolation that unhinges the logic of cause and effect and opens the viewing experience up to the 'indiscernible' and the 'indeterminable', because the spectator is presented not with the logic of 'motor action' but the simple visual description of an 'optical situation' (Deleuze 2005b: 7). A time-image forces to its surface the immanence of change within the unity of time. Here 'one and the same horizon links the cosmic to the everyday, the durable to the changing, one single and identical time as the unchanging form of that which changes' (Deleuze 2005b: 17).

The opsign is part of the broader category of time-images that Deleuze locates under the rubric of 'crystals of time' (Bogue 2003: 107). In David Rodowick's analysis,

indiscernibility is the key to understanding what Deleuze means by a crystalline image. Like an image produced in a mirror, it always has two poles: actual and virtual. [...] What indiscernibility makes visible is the ceaseless fracturing or splitting of nonchronological time. In this manner, facets of the time-image crystallize around four axes – actual and

virtual, real and imaginary, limpid and opaque, seed and milieu – organized as figures of indiscernibility (Rodowick 1997: 92).

Deleuze takes that which Schrader identifies with the ‘mysterious’ – linked thematically and textually to the particular modes of expression of the ‘Holy’ or ‘spiritual’ – to extrapolate a broader immanence, not a fantasy or illusion but a relationship between objects and their mental description, what Deleuze calls the ‘actual’ and the ‘virtual’ (in Rodowick 1997: 92).

Michael Goddard has suggested that this indiscernibility, located in the regime of the crystal image, enables Deleuze to re-inscribe the spiritual into the immanent. The crystal image becomes the locus around which mysticism, formerly inscribed with religious connotations or drawn from religious traditions, can be redefined according to a wholly immanent form of life and accessed or expressed through a semiotic system of cinema (Goddard 2001: 63). Goddard points to a mysticism as a ‘process of subjectivation and the creation of a crystalline regime of signs’ that provides a means to represent ‘a spiritual dimension wholly immanent to life in which processes of creation and differentiation, virtualisation and actualisation are continually taking place’ (Goddard 2002: 63).

Mysticism extends to the spiritual, since it ‘virtually inher[es] in the material world’; ‘[t]he spiritual and the material are simply two distinct yet indiscernible sides of the same fold’ and are derived from the ‘immanent “spiritual philosophies”’ of Bergson and Spinoza and distinct from the transcendent conception of Spirit (Goddard 2002: 62). In Bergson’s philosophy ‘[t]he mystical experience of God or “oneness” is [...] an intensification of difference and an experience of ecstatic subjectivation or metamorphosis’ (Goddard 2002: 61).

Despite connotations of mysticism (to the mysterious or spiritual) as a case of either religious or psychological experience (i.e. reported religious revelation or mental states such as schizophrenia), the link between the mysterious and the cinematic can be made. Goddard argues that,

as in the case of the mystic, cinema, in its crystalline forms, can become a spiritual tool, capable of facilitating an experience of ecstatic subjectivation in which spectators experience cinema as a pure optical and sound situation, a vision and a voice, a scattering of time crystals that leads them beyond the boundaries of their static selves and into

profound contact with the outside. If static religions always operate strategically by means of recollection-images, whereas mysticism attempts to relay spiritual movement through the direct perception of the spiritual, virtual dimensions of life, then the cinema of the time-image is uniquely placed to tactically disperse the relatively contained time crystals of mysticism, across the extended circuits of contemporary, secular mass-media communications (Goddard 2002: 62).

The question of an 'ecstatic' experience recalls the films of Werner Herzog. Alberto Toscano argues that Herzog's cinema holds a unique place in Deleuze's cinema books as the exemplification of the crystal image, since it signals 'a pure experience of time (indiscernible from eternity) and creation (indiscernible from the impassive)' (in Parr 2005, 46). Toscano points to Deleuze's examples of *Aguirre the Wrath of God*, *Kaspar Hauser* (1975) and *Heart of Glass* (1976), in which '[s]ublimity and a kind of bare life coalesce' (in Parr 2005: 47).

We can thus see how the crystal image is not simply a matter of a certain kind of intuition, but involves the construction of scenarios with their own very special kinds of actions, revealing Herzog's genius for joining the most deprived and infinitesimal of creatures with the most cosmic and grandiose of projects (in Parr 2005: 48).

In various ways and through recourse to a variety of terms, from revelation and redemption to transcendental and immanent, Bazin and Kracauer, Schrader and Deleuze have circulated a sense of the world that is in excess of the logical terms of cause and effect and of the psychologically motivated terms of rational thought, interpretation and meaning. Central to each is a fundamental relation to the 'everyday', an underlying and always already 'real', drawn out of an indexical photographic link to the object and phenomenological and existential modes of sensible, and sensuous, experience. Whether through the prolongation of spectatorial attention in the sequence shot (Bazin), or an 'everyday' that is coupled with a dislocating and disrupting mode of editing that exposes gaps in the rational, spatial organisation of image and meaning to give access to an ontological experience of presence (Kracauer, Schrader, Deleuze) and whether such 'gaps' evoke the terms of the 'Holy', the 'spiritual' or the 'virtual': in each case, the aim has been to identify or express a unity or ontological ground. Whether this takes the form of a transcendent totality of

the *Lebenswelt* (Kracauer) or a productive network of becoming (Deleuze), each seeks to separate an experiential moment of presence from a predetermined representation or signifying formula for an ideal ‘truth’. But, in seeking to redeem the world as a metaphysical unity, above and beyond specific conditions – such as those of violence and suffering, ‘sin’ and ‘evil’ – they attempt to redeem the images of the world. It is a world that is ‘fallen’ because it has been *re-presented* in images. They seek to reconstitute and disrupt those images to give the world back to thought. In Deleuze’s words, ‘[t]he modern fact is that we no longer believe in this world [...] It is not we who make cinema; it is the world which looks to us like a bad film [...] Only belief in the world can reconnect man to what he sees and hears’ (Deleuze 2005b: 166).

However, faced specifically with the violent, antagonistic and destructive, and the suffering it produces, is it the sense of the world, as images, that needs to be rethought, or the sense of how we ‘make sense’ of that world. It is not so much that the real needs to be reconnected with thought as that thought needs to be reconnected with the real. To that extent, Werner Herzog offers one more aspect to consider.

So much of Herzog’s cinema seeks to present, through the filmed image, and the act of filming, an experiential testimony to the world. His films offer a perpetual presentation of the limit situation of experience; the rhetorical recourse to the transcendent acting as a frame or marker of the limits of sense, opening the presentation of the image to experience as such, prior to or in excess of the limits of interpretation. Operating in excess of the determination of the existential subject through the presentation of nothing but the evidence of the visible, Herzog points away from the phenomenologically influenced relationship to the real in Bazin, Kracauer and Wenders, at least, to something like the ‘real’ as a post-phenomenological presentation suggested by Jean-Luc Nancy. Moreover, in Herzog’s films, the fragments of experience are inevitably processes of undoing in which the images of the indexically ‘real’ persistently mark a movement beyond the integration of ideality and materiality, of the conceptual and the sensuous, to present what is supplemental to such configuration. It ceases to be ‘representation’ – even in the sense Russell attributes to Wenders and post-war modernism – of the existential questioning of meaning and closure that is limited by the movement towards death, decay or ruin. It is the presentation, even as a process of ruination, or a ruining as it occurs, continues to occur, or maintains itself in occurring even after the ‘event’ without announcing the finality that is the inevitability of ruination or death. It is a movement away from a unity or overarching sense of

existence; its ground or immanent 'flow'. Rather, it is a movement of unravelling; not an encounter with significance so much as an opening onto the insignificance that suspends the representation of all finality, either redemption or damnation, life or death.

It is evident that so many of Herzog's films end with either suspension or with the primordial: from the monkeys adrift on Aguirre's raft to the dancing chicken of *Stroszek* (1976), caught in a repeating loop; the endlessly circulating truck that completes both *Stroszek* and *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1970), and the latter's endlessly laughing man. *Lessons of Darkness* ends with the re-lighting of fires; *Bells from the Deep* (1993) closes with the Brueghelesque skaters and fishermen on the sacred lake; and *The Wild Blue Yonder* with the description of a prehistoric Earth, a new beginning. Herzog does not aim for meaning but to release it towards what Jean-Luc Nancy has called 'the infamy of insignificance' that is the 'everyday' of existence (Nancy 2008a: 38). Certainly, a film will drag 'insignificance' back into the light of significance, into the aesthetic, but as something that escapes representation. This is the kind of 'birth' to presence that Nancy outlines:

The epoch of representation is as old as the West. It is not certain that 'the West' itself is not a single, unique 'epoch,' coextensive with humanity [...] This means that the end is not in sight, even if humanity's self-suppression is now a possibility in humanity's general program. And, consequently, the end of representation is not in sight. There is, perhaps, no humanity (and, perhaps, no animality) that does not include representation – although representation may not exhaust what, in man, passes infinitely beyond man (Nancy 1993: 1).

In this earlier work on aesthetics Nancy seeks to realign attention from the representational towards a simple 'presence' of the object that may contain representations but never define them. What then passes beyond so many possible representations is a passage towards insignificance, which elsewhere, Nancy identifies as the cinema's 'proper' inclination:

What would come back then to the proper of cinema, beyond narration and image, beyond editing and shooting, beyond script, actors or dialogues – all the elements that can

be the concern of quasi literary, pictorial, even musical approaches – would be this singular manner of being nothing but the linking of evidence (Nancy 2001: 78).

Montage, in this way, is less dialectical or psychologically and causally motivated. It is driven by the accumulation of fragments; not so much as the proactive formulation of a story or idea as it is reactive, the gathering of ‘evidence’.

[T]he most properly distinctive property of cinema, and, perhaps also that which can be least distinguished, the most indistinguishable property of the enormous flow of films throughout the world, is the linking, the indefinite sliding along of its presentation (Nancy 2001: 78).

This ‘sliding along’ defers the ‘epiphany of meaning’ or the appeal to significance and plays, instead, on a move towards insignificance:

The insignificance of life that offers itself these images, always in movement, going toward no mystery, no revelation, only this sliding along by means of which it leads itself from one image to another (exemplary, subliminal, banal, grotesque or naïve, tampered with, sketchy or overloaded) (Nancy 2001: 78).

Herzog’s ‘ecstatic truth’, Schrader’s ‘transcendental’ or Deleuze’s ‘immanence’ appear to retain a necessity for revelation, mysterious or otherwise, a profound realisation through a moment of disjunction or an instant of recognition, in the impossibility of fully understanding being. Nancy, by contrast – and Herzog’s films, despite himself – realign the condition of being onto the movement of cinema as that which continuously escapes recognition – the presence and withdrawal that is the ‘real’ of ‘sense’.

(iii) Jean-Luc Nancy: the exposed real

Nancy’s approach to the cinema begins with something like a phenomenological and ontological conception after André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer, but with key differences. Where the latter

sought to reinforce an ontology of cinematic realism, and to that extent locate a ‘redemption’ of and through the cinematic image in a totalising connection with a meaningful ‘world’, Nancy shifts the emphasis from ‘world’ to ‘sense’, in which ‘world’ is ‘sense’, fragmentary and accessed through an abundance of signification. Here the world is not a place with a singular, meaningful state, but is simply the locus of multiple, potential and conflicting meanings. The loss of an originary or singularly determined world does not result in meaninglessness. In fact, there is not a loss at all but a gain, since a world of formless signifiers is the world itself, an always already there world of ‘sense’.

In *The Evidence of Film*, dedicated to the work of Abbas Kiarostami, Nancy confirms that the industry of cinema is, has been, and most often remains, a cinema of representation, what he calls an art of the imaginary (myth) and a semiology or ‘language of signs’ (Nancy 2001: 18). Yet what he finds in the work of Kiarostami is a cinema of ‘metaphysical meditation’, though this does not mean a ‘treating of metaphysical themes (for example, in the sense that Ingmar Bergman’s *Seventh Seal* does)’. Rather, it means a ‘cinematic metaphysics, cinema as the place of meditation, as its body and its realm, as the taking-place of a relation to the sense of the world’ (Nancy 2001: 44). Nancy claims no interest in the history of cinematic styles or the fascination with images of representation and their meaning – the ‘culture of the image’ – but is drawn to the way in which Kiarostami’s technique ‘makes evident a conspicuous form of the world, a form or a sense’ (Nancy 2001: 10-12). Acknowledging more than a century of cinematic practice and its evolved theories of representation, of reality and illusion, Nancy argues that ‘a way of looking has developed that is decidedly no longer a look at representation (painting or photography, theater or any kind of spectacle)’. Instead, he argues for a difference that describes a certain ‘posture’: a ‘looking on while continually perceiving the environment of the thing beheld’ and adds that ‘it is a penetration before it is a consideration or a contemplation’ (Nancy 2001: 14).

Despite Nancy’s elusive language, it is clear that his aim is to identify a direct link between what is presented in the film and what exists, as a fragment of ‘sense’, in the profilmic. He is, however, insistent that this ‘real’ is neither ‘realist’ nor a ‘phantasm’ of the fictional, but is simply ‘life’ ‘*presented or offered in its evidence*’ (Nancy 2001: 58, italics in original). Such a presentation does not attempt to master its material, only to *present* it as descriptive, episodic fragments. This form of aesthetic realism relies on Nancy’s key term of ‘patency’, or *thereness*, developed from the Heideggarian ‘being-in-the-world’. Nancy connects ‘patency’ with a number

of other terms that speak of an approach, attitude, or concern for the images being presented: the terms ‘regard’, ‘respect’ and ‘ethos’ (Nancy 2001):

In French *regard* (look) and *égard* (regard) are more or less the same word: *re-gard* indicates a propitious distance for an intensified guard (*garde*), for looking after (*prise en garde*) (it is a Germanic root, *wardon/warten*, that yields all these words). Guarding calls for a watching and waiting, for observing, for tending attentively and overseeing (Nancy 2001: 38).

Such terms extend from the Heideggarian ‘care’ that is attributed to ‘being-in-the-world’. For Heidegger, ‘care’ is a combination of both the sense of concern or anxiety and a caring for, and equally involves the negative aspects of concern and neglect, the careful and the careless. ‘Care’ is ‘equiprimordial’: neither aspect has precedence over the other. It embodies ‘Dasein’ (Heidegger’s ‘human Being’) and relates it to its everydayness, its preoccupation with all the entities it encounters; of being with others and of being with things: of being in the world (Inwood 2000: 58). Michael Inwood points to three constituents of care: its *being ahead of itself*, a kind of suspense; *being already in the world*, the ‘always already’ fact of being in a situation, what Heidegger also calls ‘thrownness’; and *being alongside entities within the world*, or engaged in a present task or state of mind, which is often referred to as ‘fallenness’. ‘Care’ ‘is correlative to the significance of the world’ (Inwood 2000: 59).

Stephen Mulhall, in a close reading of *Being and Time*, also accentuates the link between care and anxiety with regard to everydayness. In short, care stands for the fact that ‘[t]he world and everything in it is something that cannot fail to matter’ (Mulhall 2005b: 112).

[A]nxiety lays bare the basis of Dasein’s existence as thrown projection fallen into the world. Dasein’s thrownness (exemplified in its openness to states-of-mind) shows it to be already in a world; its projectiveness (exemplified in its capacity for understanding) shows it to be at the same time ahead of itself, aiming to realize some existential possibility; and its fallenness shows it to be preoccupied with the world. This overarching tripartite characterization reveals the essential unity of Dasein’s Being to be what Heidegger calls *care* (‘Sorge’) (Mulhall 2005b: 112).

Nancy applies this kind of ‘care’ to a cinematic attitude of looking at the world, its integrated suspense, motion, preoccupation and everydayness that is apparent in the ‘intensity of an evidence’:

Cinema’s proposition here is quite far from a vision that is merely a ‘sighting’ (that looks in order merely to ‘see’): what is evident imposes itself as the setting up of a look. If this look regards that upon which it casts itself and cares for it, it will have taken care of the real: of that which resists, precisely, being absorbed in any vision (‘visions of the world,’ representations, imaginations) (Nancy 2001:18).

Nancy’s realism is not a Platonic form of originary essences, of Forms or Ideas, a *conceptual realism* that asserts universals (‘humanity’ or ‘truth’ for instance) as existing independently of human perception. Nor is it an Aristotelian form of realism linking universals that only exist *within* objects in the external world – the question of ‘categories’ (form, matter or both) and translated, in classical narrative theory, to the relations of cause and effect. It is closer to a form of *ontological realism* (a theory of what there is) in which we live in a world that exists independently of us, some aspects of which are beyond our perceptual grasp. It invites an ontological perspective of the cinema that predates the predominantly representational, semiotic critiques that, crudely speaking, identify the three key stages of cinematic form and narrative. First, the classical cinema represents this Aristotelian formula of cause and effect that gives a representation of a pre-conceived world. Second, a modernist cinema confronts the perceived loss of meaning resulting in the collapse of this pre-conceived world and its traditional representations and therefore seeks to represent this loss of meaning. To do so it utilises aspects of realism (or ‘neo-realism’) that is then undermined through the distortions of subjective (point-of-view) crises, or a self-reflexive foregrounding of the means of production. Thirdly, the post-modern cinema follows as one of pastiche and parody, irony and reflexivity, and of an overwhelming fascination with images in themselves. It remains caught in the traditional forms of meaning and representation in its bid to overcome the modernist loss of meaning with its restitution of traditional structures.

In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche had dismantled the Platonic assertion of a ‘Real World’ (the suprasensible world of Ideas) through various states of Western philosophy to demonstrate

the collapse of the ‘real’ world into the ‘apparent’ worlds of fable. Heidegger responded that in opposing reality to appearance and therefore asserting fiction, Nietzsche was merely remaining caught in the metaphysical foundation of real and apparent opposition. As Nancy’s sometime collaborator Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe says, ‘appearance is nothing other than the product of reality’ (in James 2006: 24). Ian James adds that, ‘[i]n the world become fable, a world devoid of ideality, of suprasensible essences or identities, the real is not overturned in favour of the apparent, rather any distinction between the two ceases to be operable’ (James 2006: 24). By thinking without recourse to this opposition, Nancy attempts to go beyond Heidegger with an aesthetic presentation that is a form of what he calls ‘exscription’: the process of presentation and withdrawal that takes place in any literary or artistic practice. The artwork does not proclaim a pre-given reality around which redemption might be located. Nor does it prescribe an idealist formula or axiom for signification. As James remarks:

as the pure presentation of presentation, the tracing of a figure or form beyond whose line sense absents itself, art, for Nancy, is an exposure of truth, a touching of the ‘real’ of a world, beyond or in excess of any mediation through signifying systems or discourses. Art exposes or touches a fragment of world (James 2006: 229).

Touch, a key term in Nancy’s philosophy, is applied unexpectedly to the cinema (Nancy 2001: 42) as a means to broaden ‘sense’ beyond the visual. ‘Presence is not a mere matter of vision: it offers itself in encounters, worries, concerns’ (Nancy 2001: 30). Laura McMahon notes: ‘Relations between film, viewer and world can thus be read in terms of an interruptive contingency, a contact-in-separation, echoing the deconstructive spacing of Nancy’s touch’ (McMahon 2010: 77) – the ‘deconstructive spacing’ being that which seeks to engage with contact and materiality without recourse to ‘self-identity’ or ‘self-presence’ (McMahon 2010: 78).

What is at stake in the ‘look’, or *regard*, is the terms in which the cinema confronts the spectator with a fragment of a recognisably experiential world that comprises of, but is not reduced to, the mediation of signifying symbols or discourses. It relates to a ‘real’ that is less drawn from moments of contingency or ‘authentic’ documentary duration (as in Bazin, Kracauer or Wenders in particular), than it is a matter of selection and distillation of the fragments of a thematic continuity that presents, exposes or touches a particular ‘sense’ of the world. At the

same time, a series of fragments is selected and organised precisely in the terms of its excess and withdrawal of the means of signification and the possibilities of determinate meaning. As an artwork, it is both a fragment of the world it touches and a withdrawal from that world as the presentation of a fragment separate from the world. It does not inscribe a unity of meaning to ground its world, nor does it represent an ideal or symbolic interpretation of a world, a subject or a thought process. It is neither an ahistorical, formal style (Schrader), nor a specific type of image (Deleuze). It is closest to Herzog's 'ecstatic truth' but without the boldness of such a claim. It is, simply, the enframing of a 'singular-plural' fragment of sense. What remains is for that 'touching' of sense and the affect of the look to be addressed to the symbols and the reality of violence, confrontation and the destructive aspects of experience. In response to these themes the films of Part Two operate around a concept of 'sense' drawn, I suggest, from those aspects of distress, realism and suspense that Nancy identifies. Distress attaches to those recognisable moments and sense impressions of shared anxiety and dread prior to meaning, recognition or understanding. Realism is the mode of exposure, at the limits, of the phenomenological and the symbolic, the material and the ideative. Suspense is that aspect of the cinema that moves without revelation, holding, as Nancy suggests, *'the step of thought suspended over this sense that has already touched us'* (Nancy 1997: 11 original in italics). This is the focus of Part Two.

PART TWO

Films

CHAPTER 5

A-religious Confession: *Elephant*

The previous chapter outlined a series of responses to the concept of realism in the cinema, moving finally towards that proposed by Jean-Luc Nancy, who seeks to redefine the image as an opening onto a 'real' (an affective, experiential 'sense') that exists as an excess of representation. This distinguishes Nancy's view of the real from the earlier, traditional theories of cinematic realism such as André Bazin's indexical realism or Siegfried Kracauer's mnemonic vision with its concrete relation with physical reality. Accordingly, Nancy's claims are closer to, but remain at a distance from theories that seek to access the affective forces of the real such as Paul Schrader's attempt to locate the 'mystery' of the 'Holy' in the dislocations of the 'everyday', or Gilles Deleuze's ultimate assertion of pure immanence with its continuous real of virtual relations imbued with a utopian power of thought.

Nancy's interruptive – or 'syncopatic' – mode of discontinuous existence presents the film image as a fragment of a 'sense' of the world, at once presented and withdrawn. Nancy's aim is to think the image in terms that avoid its being reinscribed and encoded within the logic of representation, thereby being constantly subservient to the symbols, archetypes and paradigms of interpretation. Yet, crucially, for a relation to the real of violence and redemption, Nancy's system does not seek to do away with the logic of symbols to locate a new 'ground' of judgement. Rather, it is through the limits of symbolic and representational signification that 'sense' is to be exposed. Reality is not dependent on a distinction between the contingent or the actual in opposition to the fictive or the symbolic. It is the limit situation of the orders of signification, that which suspends them or is in excess of their logic. It is foremost a means of looking at the world that is always already present but yet to be re-presented. Nancy observes, '[i]n the end, looking just amounts to thinking the real, to test oneself with regard to a meaning one is not mastering' (Nancy 2001: 38).

This provides a particularly nuanced diagnostic for considering the relations between violence and redemption, since such a relation traditionally depends on a logic of symbolisation (in Ricoeur's terms) and articulation where a desire to make sense of the violent depends on a

principle of cause and effect. However, emphasising the affective demand for redemption when the terms of that redemption have been suspended or withdrawn recalls Nancy's relation of the image to violence and truth. The 'bad' violence, that which is true for being violent, is an excess of violence that speaks of nothing but itself. It is the violence of representation and the spectacle of destruction. A 'true' violence, that which is violent because it is true, consists in maintaining an imminent dread. It is the jolt of recognition that comes, as Nancy suggests, with 'the revelation of this: that there is nothing to reveal' (Nancy 2005: 26).

The clearest case of the effects of the cinematic image of violence, one that both offers and withdraws interpretation, exposition or meaning, is that of the actuality of a violent event. Perhaps the most famous single actuality is not one of the Lumière Brothers' inaugural reels in cinema history but the famous Zapruder film that caught the moment of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas in November 1963. Pier Paolo Pasolini took this piece of film as the starting point for a short meditation on the relationship between the 'shot' and the 'montage' entitled 'Observations on the Long Take', at the end of which he concluded that the cut in cinema does for the shot what 'death accomplishes for life' (Pasolini 1980: 6).

In short, Pasolini argued that the shot (in particular the long take) was the cinema's 'primordial element' (Pasolini 1980: 3), a present tense equation with a viewed reality. Moreover, it was a subjective view since it was singular and must therefore equate to a singular point-of-view – even if the passive recording apparatus of the camera is detached from a human eye-line, the shot still represents a spectator's singular, subjective, point-of-view on the present reality as it unfolds. Such a primordial, present tense reality, configures a 'language of nonsymbolic signs' (Pasolini 1980: 4) that are incomplete, indecisive, mysterious. What is required is an objectivity, a 'work of choice and coordination' (Pasolini 1980: 5) to give meaning to the shot and other shots. Such is montage – which 'transforms present into past' (Pasolini 1980: 5). A fleeting or continuous present of reality is transformed into an 'historic present' (Pasolini 1980: 5) in the course of which meaning is constructed.

Taking the Zapruder film as his starting point, Pasolini argues that the long take duration of the film, unedited, from a single point of view presents one 'primordial element' of reality, evasive and indecisive – essentially meaningless. Because it remains incomplete, that is, not encrypted into something like a language system with other shots, it remains only '*in potentia*' – a potentiality, modifiable by other shots, or 'eventual future actions' (Pasolini 1980: 5). Deleuze

offers much the same argument with the proposition that cinematic images, broken apart by the cut, contain ‘virtual’ meanings yet to be revealed (Rancière 2006: 110).

Pasolini goes on to imagine multiple Zapruder films, all taken from different points of view, each a singular ‘primordial element’ in itself, loaded with nonsymbolic signs, ‘fragmentary and incomplete languages, all but incomprehensible’ (Pasolini 1980, 4). Montage, the rigorous efforts of a diligent detective, gives them meaning through combination. The leap that equates the cut with death, ‘convert[s] our present, which is infinite, unstable, and uncertain, and thus linguistically indescribable, into a clear, stable, certain, and thus linguistically describable past’ (Pasolini 1980: 6). It was Pasolini’s belief that ‘reality’ was a language for which a proper semiology had yet to be discovered: ‘I have said frequently, and always poorly, that reality has its own language – better still, it *is* a language – which, to be described, requires a general semiology, which at present we do not possess’ (Pasolini 1980: 5). This language was to be found in the actions or gestures of human beings. Such actions ‘modify’ reality and as such, leave a ‘spiritual imprint’ upon it (Pasolini 1980: 5). But all the while, such actions remain incomplete; they lack ‘unity’ and therefore, ‘meaning’ (Pasolini 1980: 5).

Pasolini’s recourse to the Zapruder film raises certain points that he does not address, since his primary motive for its reference is to support the example of the single, subjective point of view shot: a ‘primordial element’ of reality. He then speculates, through the imaginary existence of countless, variable Zapruder films, the possibility of accurately documenting the sequence of events as they occurred – though he makes no claims to solving the broader (and still unsolved) mystery of who killed Kennedy, or why, on that particular day, in that way. Nevertheless, he makes much the same argument as Godard, but in reverse. Where, for Godard, it is a matter of extracting shots already consigned to a unity – an inappropriate or corrupted unity – and return them to their status as potentialities (then re-inscribed with their true meaning), for Pasolini, each singular, primordial shot is a unity of reality, an indexical unity much like Bazin’s.

What Pasolini does not consider is the shift that takes place with regard to a shot, sequence or film, after the fact. In looking for a meaning in a ‘primordial element’ of the cinema, only from its completion in a unified context – idea, narrative, history (he is nonspecific, only equating it with a ‘life’) – he deprives the limit situation of an incomplete image of its own potential *as* an ‘indecisive’ disclosure. He overlooks the impetus of a certain type of suspense. This is brought to the fore when the film is watched by a spectator who is already fully aware of, and

therefore expects, the assassination and the moment of the bullet's impact. With this awareness, the orientation of the experience of watching the sequence alters. The indecision that accompanies an 'incomplete' shot – or for that matter, an accumulation of incomplete shots as a multitude of Zapruder films would remain – repositions the experiencing of cinematic images as a suspension, a tension and a demand. It insists upon an always already sense of the primacy of events in the world, which Pasolini admits to: 'The substance of cinema is therefore an endless long take, as is reality to our senses for as long as we are able to see and feel' (Pasolini 1980: 5). It shifts the emphasis from death to life. For Pasolini lives become "expressive" at the point of death because '*while living we lack meaning*'. Death condenses life into a pattern of 'significant moments' (Pasolini 1980: 6, italics in original). But alternatively, could it not be the case that to lack meaning is to be living and to be living is to experience the limits of meaning, which would be the cinema's demand?

The presentation of a suspension explicitly calls into question Pasolini's notion of a conversion of the 'linguistically indescribable present' into a 'linguistically describable past' (Pasolini 1980: 6). Such a conflict, or limit situation, drives to the heart of Gus Van Sant's treatment of a 'real life' incident (an historical 'actuality') in his 2003 film *Elephant*. In this case, it is not so much a matter of 'transforming the present into the past' as it is a case of transforming the past back into a present, precisely because it remains undecidable as an event.

Elephant depicts, through a series of overlapping and partially repeating sequences, fragments of the events preceding, leading up to and during a shooting committed by two students in a contemporary American high school. Several students are singled out, including the two killers, and the film describes, in a dispassionate, observational style of lengthy Steadicam shots, brief moments, exchanges and episodes in the daily routines of its characters. One student, Elias, takes photographs of his peers on the way to school, processes the photographs and walks to the library. Another, John, tries to contact family members to assist his alcoholic father waiting outside the school. Nathan finishes football practice and meets his girlfriend, Carrie, who believes that she is pregnant. Three girls have lunch then force themselves to vomit in the toilets. Michelle has a PE lesson then heads for library duties. Eric meets Alex. They head for the school where, armed with assault rifles, they go on a shooting rampage, killing students and staff before Alex shoots Eric. The film ends – suspended – at the moment when Alex has cornered Nathan and Carrie in the school kitchen.

Elephant is a film that exists because words have failed. The event it depicts has (so far) proved itself to be essentially indescribable, at least in the sense of providing any meaning, motive, or understanding for its happening. Nevertheless, such events continue to occur, each as 'meaningless' as the last. When words fail, all the narratives, motives, meanings and presuppositions, all the tethers to the logic of reason also appear to fail. Faced with such a collapse of interpretation, in place of telling, the film *Elephant* looks on. It persists in looking as an imagined witness to the ebb and flow of the everyday conditions of its imminent, violent event. As a silent witness, it gathers an index of moments as they may have been, aborted or unfulfilled, the remnants of motion, of gesture, of time as it passes or as it may have passed, and plays them and replays them. It is a film conditioned by a certain compulsion, a dread, collapsing together the sheer inability to resist looking and the necessary persistence of looking also; and 'taking time,' both passing time (slowly) and grabbing time back or arresting time. In the face of the rupture of violence that stalks the timeframe of *Elephant*, the cinema's conformity to a frictionless process of action and reaction can no longer ring true, and the historical causes of the film's final moments have already passed incomprehensibly. *Elephant* is something of a remainder: it describes what remains, it is the visible excess, beyond all the words and interpretations. It exposes the 'elephant in the room' – the unavoidable evidence that cannot be spoken of. This is the part of the present that Pasolini fails to account for: that which remains when the 'historic presents' continue to evade meaning.

The film is a re-imagining of an American high-school shooting so clearly reminiscent of the one which took place at Columbine High School on 20th April 1999 that the actual incident and the film are inextricably intertwined. The film found critical acclaim – it won the *Palme d'Or* at Cannes in 2003 – but it was reviled in equal measure, especially in parts of the United States, where the Hollywood journal *Variety*, most notably, called it 'gross and exploitative' and 'pointless at best and irresponsible at worst' (McCarthy 2003), which perhaps says more about the closeness of events to a national consciousness, a response to the rubbing of sores, than it does of the film's particular cinematic attributes. Van Sant appropriated the title from a 1988 work by the British director Alan Clark, a short, forty minute television film that addressed the sectarian killings taking place in Northern Ireland with a distillation of the acts of murder – walking, killing, and the stillness of death – utterly devoid of sectarian identities, of motive, punishment, justification or redemption. Van Sant's *Elephant* adopts that same forensic observation and turns it

onto a cross-sectional group of high-school students connected only by their collective proximity in the moments before one mass killing. Such an apparent reserve, the elevation of a delineated showing over an explanatory telling, may disturb the consciences of those searching for, or demanding, reasons for such violent, murderous actions. And yet, it is perhaps precisely this resistance to dramatic psychology, to motives and morals, judgements and platitudes – to words and the traditional modes of narrative; to the plotting and revealing of meaning – that makes the film such a painstaking and measured consideration of an essentially inexplicable act.

However, the refusal of the interpretative mechanisms of traditional narrative forms, whether classical (of determined representations) or modernist (at least, a certain subjective existentialism), should not be taken simply to assert that *Elephant* operates nothing more than an opposition or a negation of conventional representational tropes evoking only meaninglessness. Rather, if it can be said to have a responsibility, it lies in its address in which the playing, or replaying, of lost time deliberately undermines the clamour of instants that define an event historically, of time, place, identity, or act, as they are used in the reconstruction of facts into interpretations according to the recognisable evidence.

There is a line of argument that says that a replaying of such distressing events as a high-school shooting is nothing but a ghoulish spectacle or a glamorisation that can only encourage the repetition of atrocity; that it can only plant the idea and instruct in the means. But such a reductive argument would seem to misconstrue the nuances and diversity of spectatorship, and raises the question of to whom such a film might be making its appeal. Furthermore, naively disregarding the unstoppable abundance of images, provocations and instructions ever present in the world casts the cinema as subject to a self-censorship, a *Bilderverbot*. Conversely, it serves merely as an endorsement for the cartoonish excesses of violence deemed permissible on account of a self-evidently illusory or fantastic styling or by recourse to the repetition of lazily co-opted moral frameworks. The latter is a perpetual hub around which particular strains of ‘post-modern’ pastiche and irony revolve in an ever-circulating dance of the damned. Kim Newman has written of the shift, over the last decade, in the orientation of the horror film from near parables of transgression and punishment to extended brutality and the mechanics of cruelty as the *raison d’être* of generic form (Newman 2006). The complexities of Newman’s thesis are beyond the scope of the present study, but suffice it to say that a distinction is necessary between the type of suspense and deferral enacted in these explicitly generic films that might be summarised accordingly: The

‘slasher’ or ‘torture-porn’ genres tap into a certain vernacular relation between audience and spectacle; the audience already recognising and expecting the tropes the film delivers. Traditional modes of suspense are applied in which the tensions and fates of the killer, victims and survivors are accounted for and order is temporarily restored through the escape of the final victim rather than the fate of the killer. Finally, the fate of the killer is deferred through the mechanism of the sequel. This is a crucially different deferral from that set out in this thesis. Rather, it is one in which the deferral of justice or punishment is encoded into the logic of the serialised ‘cliffhanger’ ending and the symbolic structures of the genre. Overall, these films separate themselves from the world through their immersion in their representational archetypes. Contrary to this, and to reiterate Gus Van Sant on the subject of the violence in *Elephant*, it is because audiences ‘believe’ the violence of *Elephant* that it disturbs (in Saïd 2004, 18).

The fact is that *Elephant* appears to withdraw more than it reveals. It presents the fear itself, the suspense in imminence of a terror that floats like a spectre down the halls of a high school. It has stripped itself of every archetype, of every psychological, narrative, generic, thrilling point of reference to rely on nothing but the anxiety of its audience’s collective memories. In that respect it is the trembling culmination and the rolling banality of imminent violence locked into immediate history. It is a violence turned systemic: the incomprehensible consequence of what infiltrates the seamless procession of modern everyday existence. In its reduction, having dispensed with the varying logic of narrative genre and withdrawn from the reflexive concerns of a modernist intervention into the semiotics of the mediated image, it has ‘enframed’ an event rather than ‘emplotted’ it. It operates a form of cutting, couched in terms of ellipsis and repetition, that serves to reinforce its essential insistence on looking that carries with it something of an inheritance born of the ‘primitive’ ‘cinema of attractions’. It is an inheritance that is both an unearthing and an overturning. On the one hand, it is an inheritance that retains the insistence that classical narration or representational illusion is neither a rule nor inevitability, and one that is perhaps even exhausted under such brutal, factual circumstances, and that cinema properly begins with a direct address to the look, a display of fragmentary moments conceived as autonomous shots and scenes and only then, passed through a composition of montage constructed as a passage or continuance of autonomous fragments not subordinated to an overarching plot or meaning. On the other hand, those aspects of the inheritance that revelled in the self-conscious exhibitionism of actors and of spectacle are overturned with something like an insistence upon the look directed at

a condition, or a state of affairs; of a deliberate anonymity and actuality; of persons absorbed into a fleeting presence and its passing.

The legacy of an early, so-called 'pre-narrative' cinema for *Elephant* is less that it asserts or attempts to impose a 'new' kind of representational cinema but rather that it has recourse to what has always been present in the cinema, an indexical link between the apparatus and that which presents itself to it. Such a revisionism of the 'pre-narrative' traits performed as a bond between diegesis and apparatus is distinct from the self-reflexive distrust of apparatus reminiscent of a certain kind of 'anti-narrative' post-Second World War modernism that is still with us, a line that runs from Jean-Luc Godard to Michael Haneke, for whom the site of cinema's 'realist' artifice and illusory sleight-of-hand is the site of its necessary guilt. For that matter, a return to a point prior to classical narrative is a return to a point prior, also, to such narrative's subjective opposite, the existential crises of another kind of post-Second World War modernism in which the phenomenology of the world is determined by the psychological crises of its protagonists cut adrift in time and place.

Elephant is a film that exists in direct reference to the historical fact of the Columbine shootings and its media-saturated aftermath. In that respect, it invites three principal lines of interpretation. Firstly, there is the interpretation of the 'event' of Columbine itself, on the grounds of which the film is largely criticised for failing to 'interpret': failing to take a position with respect to motive or causation and similarly, failing to offer either psychological grounds for the actions of the killers, or to present a clearly defined order of justice and empathy for the victims. Secondly, there is a certain 'modernist' position that interprets the withholding of 'meaning' or interpretation as an intervention or critical rupture of the flow of mass-mediated images and discourse that followed and surrounded the event. Such a suspension is said to draw attention to the event's mediated representation and its inadequacies or ideologies. Thirdly, there is a particular post-modern position that prescribes the event as an inexplicable horror whose motives cannot be known and the terms of reference are 'unpresentable'. This Lyotardian inflection, as Jacques Rancière argues, posits the artwork as an act of 'mourning' or a type of lament drawn from a reconfiguration of the sublime (Rancière 2004: 29).

The parameters of these initial modes of critique come into focus when *Elephant* is placed alongside other films that either respond to the Columbine shooting or, more broadly, to alternative incidents of similarly unpredictable violent content. In the first place, *Elephant* can be

placed alongside the example of Michael Moore's polemical treatment of the incident in *Bowling for Columbine* (2002).

Moore's film accentuates interpretative conventions through its traditional mode of polemical 'documentary' form. It places 'fact' and its pre-meditated confrontation and questioning of circumstances at the forefront. Van Sant's film, by contrast, operates around an assumed reference to Columbine and its mediated aftermath, known to its audience, refashioning events fictively but within parallel scenic circumstances. *Elephant* also deliberately plays with points of reference from the mediated discourse, including within it a single line of dialogue attributed to the actual killers (the innocuous "have fun"). It also shows the killers watching images of Nazis on a television documentary, playing violent video games and kissing in the shower. Such video games, along with neo-Nazism and homosexuality were among the accusations levelled at the original killers, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. Incidentally, the film also shows the fictional killers playing Beethoven's moonlight sonata on the piano but this was not singled out as a possibly incriminating reference in reviews of the film. Motives and reasons, explicitly stated in *Bowling for Columbine*, such as the easy availability of guns and ammunition, the culture of gun ownership in the US and the de-humanising conditions of ultra-competitive American high-schools, are only loosely suggested in *Elephant*. The teenage killers are seen buying an assault rifle by mail-order and, briefly, as the victims of a moment of classroom victimisation.

Bowling for Columbine discerns a series of 'reasons' for such a violent rupture into everyday life and sets about identifying them, identifying the organisations and institutions behind them, and confronting them. It presents images as facts and facts as the basis of its polemic. Truth or falsity is played out as a point of argument carried out on screen. *Elephant*, by contrast, is linked to the historical event of Columbine through an intertextual relationship. It is that relationship that continually invites consideration of the film in terms of fiction and falsity; to modes of story against history, interpretation against impression, and the determining criteria of 'truth' in the historical and poetic senses. All of which, by extension, invokes claims of 'irresponsibility' and the terms of 'responsibility'. *Bowling for Columbine* and *Elephant* would appear to sit at either pole of what Jacques Rancière described, recalling the 'distribution of the sensible', as the two extremes of aesthetic relationship between what can be 'said' and what can be 'seen'. The essential shift, in terms of a movement away from what can be said to what is seen – emplotting to enframing – is the logic of narrative: its pre-determinations, as to 'what happened' or 'what could happen'

(history or fiction) becomes redundant. The aesthetics of an event is entangled in the arrangement of signs and images. Such is Rancière's 'thwarted fable' which serves to problematise any presuppositions made about the ordering of events, whether fictive or historical, and therefore places the political centre stage.

Whether or not *Elephant* is a 'political' film would again seem to hinge on the question of 'responsibility' towards the historical Columbine itself, where a modernist account is determined by the film's intervention into, or suspension of, the mediated representation of its factual equivalent. In this respect, the film recalls Alan Clarke's 1988 film (*Elephant*) from which Van Sant's film directly takes its name. Clarke stated that he produced his film as a direct intervention into the representation in the media of the sectarian violence that was taking place in Northern Ireland at that time. His film, a forty minute television piece initially only broadcast locally in the province, distils acts of sectarian murder into an anonymous repetition, or ritual, of brutal, factual images: the approach, the murder, the dead. It encapsulates the modernist critical interpretation of cinema as the self-reflexive construct, drawing attention to and interrupting the flow of mass media and commodified images and narratives with the suspension of meaning and narration itself. Van Sant's film shares much of this technique but it also retains some distinct stylistic differences from Clarke's film. Alan Clarke reduces the technique of repetition, rhythm and stasis (with minimal, naturalistic sound) to a form of immanence, the ever-present occurrence of violence that was in the background of daily life in Northern Ireland. Clarke described the sectarian murder as the province's 'elephant in the room' (Boyle 1988). His film is a stripping away of daily life to leave only the violence. The film delivers a brute and ever-present facticity formed in relation to the very localised spatial arrangements of time, place and act. All figures, both killers and victims, remain entirely anonymous. *Elephant* (1988) reduces the rhythms of walking, killing, stasis-in-death to a constant repetition. Its only structural shift occurs in the final sequence in which the constant repetition is disrupted as one of two men, seemingly both executioners, becomes the executed as he is walked to his death, the killers having turned on themselves. Amidst the bleak milieu of Clarke's film, something like a demand imposes itself, not least, the demand for the form to break out of its own apparent feedback loop. As a formula, it is reminiscent of the situation proposed by Schelling in his *Ages of the World*, in which the conditions declare the necessity of a radical decision to break a deadlock. In Schelling's proposition, the Divine Being is trapped in the perpetual chaos of 'eternity'. What it seeks is the decision ('in the

beginning was the Word') that will fracture eternity and deliver a linear, historical time (see Zizek 1997: 14).

As in Alan Clarke's film, *Elephant* (2003) provides no roll-call of the dead. We are not confronted with documented victims or survivors (as we are in *Bowling for Columbine*). The film is expressly even-handed in its depiction of, and screen-time apportioned to, both victims and killers. The film does, however, 'name' some of its fictional characters via introductory captions that also punctuate the sequential overlaps. This leads to certain other distinctions from Clarke's approach. Van Sant considerably abstracts the film's minimal parts. Lengthy sequence shots incorporating diffuse focal lengths, an over-lapping temporal arrangement, intrusive, 'de-realising' slow-motion effects and a non-naturalistic soundtrack constantly undermine a strictly 'naturalistic' presentation of images, deferring to the inconclusive, the elusive, and incomplete.

There is little in Van Sant's film that can be described as a lament, memorialisation or act of mourning for those involved in the actual event of Columbine as is the case in certain recent fictionalised re-presentations of historical – and catastrophic – events, such as *United 93* (2006) or *World Trade Center* (2006). Van Sant's emphasis, then, of *pathos* over *logos*, in Rancière's terms, pushes the film away from an historical context towards an impressionistic, aesthetic one. Van Sant has recalled in interview that Columbine was the starting point, and the key point of reference for *Elephant*, citing scripts written by various collaborators and aborted in the intervening years. The film's development and production details a movement away from the procedures of dramatic fiction to an improvisatory and impressionistic observation configured within the topography of the film's location and the characterisation of its non-professional cast. In this more general sense, *Elephant* takes its place within a sequence of works beginning with *Gerry* (2001) and moving on to *Last Days* (2005) and *Paranoid Park* (2008) in which Van Sant continues the theme of young male violence (murder, suicide, accident respectively) and in the process hints at the broader themes of fate, chance, grace, and the sublime.

A school shooting such as Columbine is charged with the desire to seek interpretation, and in the absence of documented evidence (confessions by the killers, a clearly identifiable forensic narrative of events – something like Pasolini's multiple Zapruder films) the nature of the 'inexplicable' as a form of 'radical evil' surfaces in the inflection of a certain kind of 'post-modern sublime': the impossibility or unspeakability of interpretation for which the 'sublime' functions as an aesthetic conceptualisation that transgresses the limits of interpretation. The concept of the

sublime forms a more detailed discussion in later chapters. Here, it is simply worth noting that the post-modern sublime collapses the monstrous into established 'laws': in its psychoanalytic reading it becomes the Real that erupts from beneath the Symbolic, an always already morbid excess within any symbolic order. Jean-François Lyotard's more overtly aesthetic reading of the sublime subverts the unifying criteria of Kant's original sublime with an incompatibility that collapses the possibilities for human understanding via form and presentation: events are rendered 'unthinkable' or 'unpresentable' and the aesthetic response is a recognition of the 'it happens' rather than the exposition of the 'what happens'.

Jacques Rancière has examined Lyotard's aesthetic sublime and concluded that it, in fact, renegotiates a redemptive force as it reconfigures an 'end of art' – a state beyond art since it generates a dissolution of the material means of art and its dialectical representation – thereby formulating a signature that is 'a fidelity to an original debt'. Teleological, narrative or salvific criteria are dissolved but a redemptive impetus remains as 'the formative reason of art' (Rancière 2007: 136). This latter redemptive impetus derives from Lyotard's reliance on certain avant-garde artistic practices as the vital means to mark the limits of a capitalist, consumer society; a means to disrupt the unity and totality of a (false) consensus. To this extent the aesthetic is political, the sublime standing for an opposition for such consensus between object and idea and the refusal of the signs of history to conform to narrative representation. Such a reading would appear to define *Elephant* as a work operating in accord with this conception of the sublime. Criticism of this reading of the sublime claims that the rupture of meaning leads only to an 'apophysis of the monstrous' that denies any ethical distinction between the 'ineffable' and the 'transcendent', not to a recognition of an ethical 'decision' but only to a 'speechlessness' (Kearney 2003: 88-89). In terms of *Elephant's* relation to the sublime and the instance of decision, it can be seen less as one of opposition and the rupture of unity and dialectic synthesis and more as one of a deconstructive form of indecision or 'undecidability'; that is, not as a substantive or meaningful ground upon which to propose a new politics of the sublime but as the production of an undecidability that is the process of 'showing' and withdrawing the terms of recognition. Van Sant's *Elephant* gives itself over to both suspense (anticipation of the known historical incident) and suspension (a withholding of a definitive end and its ultimate incompleteness). It presents a constant rhythm that fluctuates between the grounding and the groundlessness of any terms for understanding the

incident as it unfolds, withdrawing the terms of redemption through opposition that might be implied in its equal denial of the traditional narrative or interpretative structures of meaning.

The film certainly confounds attempts to propose an oppositional meaning in the event, such as that put forward in a recent book by Mark Ames, *Going Postal* (2007), in which the author seeks to locate Columbine, along with all such high-school and workplace shootings (labelled 'rage murders'), into a politicised genealogy of 'slave rebellions' and violent acts of protest and emancipation from past eras of (American) history. The counter-argument to Ames' overblown collective mythology is the liberal-humanist critique that wishes to take each incident on its merits as a case of individual pathology and therefore, to ignore the possibility of a 'systemic' root of violence that runs deeper than the actions of particular subjects. Devoid of a means to access the psychology of the perpetrators, the focus shifts to that of 'fate' or 'chance' (the randomness of victims, for instance) or the peculiarly contemporary (cinematic) theme of redemption in the guise of violence as 'pay-back' for unspecified or unlocated resentment – an effective nihilism. Such assessments are suggestive of the mediated rhetoric of 'tragedy'. Terry Eagleton, discussing forms of tragedy in literature and in 'life' in *Sweet Violence* (2003), distinguishes between classical (Aristotelian) or 'normative' forms of tragedy, which could not countenance the actions or deaths of 'villains' as being tragic in any way – a tragedy based on moral, instructive terms – and what he calls a 'certain strain of existentialist philosophy' that sees all kinds of death as tragic through its 'sombre, gloomy, even at times nihilistic' mode of pessimism (Eagleton 2003, 9). This latter context sums up the recent Estonian film *The Class* (2007), 'inspired by the Columbine tragedy' (Simon 2007) as *Variety* noted, that located a rationale for such an incident squarely in a drama of bullying and revenge played out predominantly from the victim-cum-eventual-murderers' point of view.

After so many withdrawals of meaning, what remains of *Elephant* would seem to be mere remains, a cinematic remainder after the actual historical event to which it refers. Furthermore, since *Elephant* appears to conceal all interpretative faculties and to suspend its images of everyday events as they are defiled by a single moment of violent rupture within a strategy of affectivity over meaning, how can it be coupled to any currency of redemption?

It is worth recalling Gilles Deleuze's project to redeem the images of cinema and Jacques Rancière's observation that this amounts to the 'restitution of world images to themselves', or a means of reclaiming a 'belief in this world' through the historico-aesthetic rupture of the time-

image (Deleuze 2005b: 181). Deleuze sets out to define a semiotics of cinema as thought, thought as image, such that he closes his two volumes with the observation that '[c]inema itself is a new practice of images and signs, whose theory philosophy must produce as conceptual practice' (Deleuze 2005b: 269). However, Jacques Rancière has argued that this is not a matter of distinguishing between two types of cinematic sign or image – the classical or modernist; movement-image or time-image in all their variations – but of respective points of view toward the cinematic image. For Deleuze, it was a matter of locating cinematic images that returned the viewing experience to one of thought and the construction of new concepts. In contrast, Rancière claims that it is rather the apparatus of cinema and the cinematic image that has the potential to 'thwart' given meaning with an excess of sense-impressions. Each image is, in effect, the potential site or limit situation of meaning. Rancière's formulation of contradictory images points towards Jean-Luc Nancy's concern with the image as an exposure of the 'real' – an always already 'sense' – from the limit situation of signification. The orientation, or 'regard' that Nancy identifies in the cinema of Kiarostami stems from a particular selection by the film-maker: an orientation precisely toward that which operates in excess of signification; precisely that which fails to *make sense*. The orientation of looking of which Nancy writes (Nancy 2001) is a matter of delineating the excess, or remainder, of cinematic images that draw attention, or expose, the withdrawal of meaning. In that respect the 'real' to which it attempts to pay attention is presented as a presentation. It is not an accident that interrupts the frame (as Benjamin implies), nor a retrospective correction to a real hidden beneath the ideological (as Godard implies). Nor is it the rupture, as interval or broken link in a chain of articulation that gives onto a formless, chaotic real of matter-light (as Deleuze implies). It is here that Deleuze's thesis seems to overshoot interpretation: cinema itself becomes an instrument for the distribution of Deleuze's philosophical and conceptual project; the act of violence and the means to respond is buried under the philosopher's conceptual apparatus.

Yet, *Elephant* insists upon the form and rhythm of selective looking at the brief moments of a violent rupture; a 'monstration' that allows the condition of a situation to expose itself at the same time as it is in excess of and shatters any encoded logic of interpretation. *Elephant* presents the condition of dread, terror or anxiety as a felt experience: an exposure to the senses of the terms of what has passed and may occur again. The distinction between Nancy's position and that of Deleuze, who also proclaims an 'outside' (Deleuze 2005b: 170) that suggests something similar to Nancy's configuration of 'sense', comes down to a shift of orientation from the attempt to

identify a specific image of thought (Deleuze) to a 'sense' derived from the cinematic image that exposes the incompatibility, or undecidability, of the available modes of discourse (Nancy). In short, Nancy proposes not a typology of image and meaning but the delineation of the limit situation of meaning. It configures a relation between film, viewer and world that, as Laura McMahon has recently noted, 'can thus be read in terms of an interruptive contiguity, a contact-in-separation' (McMahon 2010: 77). Cinema's giving of 'evidence' re-works Heidegger's account of art and technology as revealing and concealing: he used the term *aletheia*. 'This intersection of *aletheia*, evidence and the real thus allows Nancy to redeem realism from the regimes of representation, indexicality and identification, untying cinema from the various theoretical and philosophical traditions which seek to enshrine it' (McMahon 2010: 78).

Here we have Nancy's artwork as the locus of a 'transimmanent' expression of sense in which the material and the transcendent, the real and the representational, are mutually interruptive. As McMahon notes, 'opening onto this mode of mutual interruption, here cinema restates itself in its relation to the sense of the world – its truths embedded in the evident, the material, the real' (McMahon 2010: 82).

McMahon relates this 'transimmanence' to a commentary Nancy wrote on the subject of Claire Denis's film *Beau Travail* (1999) in which Nancy argues that the image makes of itself an icon, 'an image which itself gives birth to the presence it represents' (in McMahon 2010: 82). McMahon points out that, in its original religious sense, the icon symbolises something beyond itself through resemblance or association. However, in Nancy's argument, the cinematic image, as iconic presence, becomes an 'image that does not represent anything other than itself' (McMahon 2010: 83). Therefore, much as Nancy, in a meditation on religious paintings of *Noli me tangere*, had sought to extend the characteristics of the image of the resurrection to a non-religious presentation, as a withdrawal of symbol and meaning, so too, with regard to *Beau Travail*, does he formulate an 'a-religious, non-representational sense' of the cinematic image that, at the same time, acknowledges a debt to the religious and representational contexts in which the limited terms of meaning are embedded (McMahon 2010: 83).

It is here then, that we might finally begin to present a case for *Elephant* that is characterised by a short footnote in Nancy's book on Kiarostami:

In each instance one deals with a cinema opening onto its own image as onto something real – or meaningful – that can only be taken by images, aiming from somewhere beyond any “point of view,” with a look devoid of subjectivity, with a lens that would aim for life from the vantage point of the secret of death as the secret of something evident (Nancy 2001: 52).

Elephant presents the sense of a felt contact with the conditions of dread, fear – of trembling – at the event and the responsibility it encapsulates. In short, it is a sense of the aporetic of decision at the heart of all responsibility for the event. Whether it is the unfathomable decision of the killers to act and the incomprehensible, inconclusive demand for the decision of judgement, justice or retribution that such an event provokes both present the tension of necessity, its imminence, stripped of the release of that tension. In passing, we can recall Derrida’s highlighting of the ‘secret’ at the heart of absolute responsibility that he extracts from a reading of Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, that first locates the origin of ‘trembling’ in an event or decision; that which occurs in anticipation of the event or decision that has immediately passed and yet could come again. Derrida writes, ‘[a]s different as dread, fear, anxiety, terror, panic, or anguish remain from one another, they have already begun in the trembling, and what has provoked them continues or threatens to continue, to make us tremble’ (Derrida 1996: 54).

Yet crucially, in Nancy’s ‘non-representational real’, this trembling is devoid of subjectivity; the camera presents a pure icon of presence. A close examination of a short sequence from near the end of *Elephant* highlights the tension at work in Van Sant’s meticulous shot construction. Towards the end of the killer’s rampage (one hour and ten minutes into the film) are the following two shots: the first lasts one minute and twenty-two seconds; the second three minutes and six seconds. Each is a continuous Steadicam track. The frame is fixed on a short focal length with one of the killers, Alex, composed in medium shot. Alex is in focus; an absence of depth of field throws all of the middle and background distance out of focus, effectively setting a focal plane in the foreground that is only apparent when a body or object intersects with it.

The first shot is a reverse track facing Alex as he shoots, strides down a corridor, then reloads. As he reloads, the camera continues to circle him, turning a reverse track into a forward track, now following Alex. All the time, only Alex is in focus, all other elements of the frame are soft: an impressionistic blur emphasised by the soundtrack that combines a realist diegetic – the

empty, echoing corridors, the distant voices – with a non-diegetic overlay of bird song, bells, gurgling water, electronic pulses.

There is a cut to an entirely blurred frame of a corridor: two figures run towards the camera, coming into focus, revealed as two students, Carrie and Nathan. The blurred silhouette of Alex passes in the background. Carrie and Nathan exit the frame, which holds, blurred again as this time, Alex emerges from soft into sharp focus. Once Alex has come into focus the camera latches onto him, panning as he enters the silent, disrupted canteen and sits at a table, the body of a cook lying, slightly out of focus, in the background. The voice of Eric, the other killer, interrupts the stillness from off-screen. The camera whip-pans to frame Eric; he is now in focus, the focal point. He talks garrulously: a sudden off-screen gunshot, Eric crumples, leaving a blurred frame that is an exact reprise of that of the corridor through which both Carrie and Nathan, and Alex, have moved. Alex now re-enters frame, the shot still continuous. Again the focal point, the camera remains locked on Alex, tracking him through the kitchen as he follows a noise until he discovers Carrie and Nathan hiding in a walk-in refrigerator. The camera pauses on the three figures, now all in focus, then gradually reverse tracks away as Alex utters the film's final words, the child-rhyme 'eeny-meeny-miny-mo' as his figure loses focus in the frame.

The core of this four and a half minutes, and two shots, of *Elephant* is its focal plane, a point that is concealed until a body interrupts it, comes into contact with it, and reveals itself. This plane is devoid of subject; it is interchangeable. It remains a withdrawn but ever present 'presence' and tension within the frame that is otherwise an impressionistic, indistinct image without clarity. Shock, suspense, empathy and incomprehensibility intersect sporadically across this focal plane in the faces and bodies of Alex, Eric, Carrie and Nathan. It opens onto the expressive and affective sense of exposure; an evidence of the real of such an event without representational terms of its management or containment. The tension of the event spills over constantly into the blurred topography of the school.

It is this framing, fluctuating focal plane, the flowing continuous shot without the order of dialectic cutting or synthesis, that separates the 'iconic presence' of *Elephant's* sequential images from the terms of the symbolic images that Ricoeur associated with the trembling or 'dread' of defilement. *Elephant* depicts the defilement of the norm, a high school, and the suffering of those innocent staff and students fleetingly seen to be shot down. As an event, the shooting is, by any standards a defilement, a 'sin'. Without the traditional discourse of judgement, however, *Elephant*

leaves us adrift. The film collapses together Ricoeur's progressive hermeneutics of symbolic order: 'in defilement I accuse another, in sin I am accused, in guilt I accuse myself' (Simms 2003: 23). The order has escaped us: we can accuse others, we can try to conceive the event in broader human terms, we can even wonder at our own complicity.

However, Nancy's mode of interpretation frees us from Ricoeur's need to re-inscribe these stages back into a traditional, religiously inflected hermeneutics of meaning. There is no need for the terms and necessary articulations of 'sin' and 'guilt' that underpins the history of salvation. If sin is the emergence of self-awareness (the knowledge of good and evil) and salvation (which is not the expiation of a misdeed but the redemption of the person who has sinned) is the opening of the self to the grace of God, then, as Nancy suggests in *Dis-Enclosure*, we should look not at the self but at the opening of the self to the other (Nancy 2008b: 156). To that extent, God is an 'auto-affection', presenting the self to the self. Or put yet another way, it is the opening of sense, 'the Open of proclamation' (Nancy 2008b: 156). That which for Ricoeur is a 'confession', dependent on subjectivity and a system of symbols, is re-inscribed by Nancy as an affective opening onto 'sense'; an a-religious proclamation of the real as it is exposed.

There is one further manoeuvre that Nancy makes elsewhere that bears on *Elephant's* cinematic image and the tension and trembling it evokes. In an essay entitled 'The Image-The Distinct', in *The Ground of the Image*, Nancy refers to the 'self-coincidence of the image'. Again it is the image in excess of signification, that which 'excludes its conformity to a perceived object or to a coded sentiment or well-defined function' (Nancy 2005: 10). The image is 'the distension of a present of intensity' (Nancy 2005, 10). Nancy adopts the term '*methexis*' by which the intensity of the images' withdrawal and excess creates a 'participation or a contagion through which the image seizes us' (Nancy 2005: 9). Referring to painting, Nancy charts the tension, the *methexis*, of the image of the nude – its attraction and retreat that opens onto the limit situation of the erotic and the pornographic. Such a *methexis*, the contagion, that which grips us with tension in the image, is present in the terms of violence exposed in *Elephant*. Ginette Michaud writes of Nancy's use of *methexis*, giving an emphasis that ties it to the ethical – the demand conjured from the intensity of the image – prior to, or in excess of, the political or religious:

It is not about entertainment or becoming-cultural, but about the fact that art – in front of us and within us – opens up and works on the question of the world, and that this other

concept of the political that requires examination and rigorous analysis transcends any science of government or of public law. To think *ex nihilo*, with no preconceptions, with no model, is what art has always done: it is the reason – surpassing reason itself – that should commit us to passing through it in order to ponder the coexistence and the conflict of ‘a world of bodies, a world of senses, a world of the being-in-the-world’ (Michaud 2005: 122).

If such an interpretation of *Elephant* fails to provide any terms for understanding or dealing with the violence and suffering it depicts, that is ultimately to prescribe too great a demand on a work of cinema. As Nancy also argues, ‘[a]rt is not a simulacrum or an apotropaic that would protect us from unjustifiable violence’ (Nancy 2005: 26). *Elephant*’s suspension in the midst of the intensity of indecision is an imminence suspended infinitely over itself and over ourselves. As an artwork, or a work of the cinema, *Elephant* may not pose any solutions to world events, only the enigma of the world itself. But this is, precisely, the cinema that has emerged in the wake of the collapse of political certainties in the present era. The closeness with which a few directors have produced works that mirror the conceptual concerns of philosophy – of Derrida, of Nancy – points to a cinema that, first and foremost, is engaging with the world rather than with the tired images and symbols of representational tradition, an a-religious ‘confession’ of violent and destructive experience.

CHAPTER 6

Defilement: *Flanders*

Paul Virilio has argued that the logic of war and the logic of vision and the cinema are derived from the same source; that perception and destruction are inescapably interlinked within a 'geometrification of looking'. Both ostensibly operate systems of taking aim. He notes how this technical alignment used to be known, to the French at least, as the 'faith line' and how this 'faith', in looking, has been replaced by the 'obliviousness' of the modern, remote, technologies of war. In short, an ethics of sorts, of the antiquated relation of sighting that linked adversaries in heroic, life and death contact, with its prominence of mortality, has been steadily erased. Instead, it is replaced with the techno-optics and the 'synthetic image' of the representation or modelling of conflict in which seeing is omnipotent yet estranged from the real, despite the accelerated and exponential expansion of its destructive capabilities (Virilio 1989). He cites the pioneering French film director, Abel Gance, in respect of this shift in emphasis from the real to the representational: 'Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter the Hell of Images' (in Virilio 1989: 31).

Whilst this chapter makes no attempt to validate or otherwise Virilio's particular and provocative genealogy of the twin technologies of war and cinema, it does retain one aspect of that genealogy: the reflection of the real in relation to the cinema's depiction of war; its 'sighting' and its representation of the most extreme form of human violence and conflict.

It begins and ends with Bruno Dumont's 2007 film *Flanders*, since, it will be argued, this film eschews the narrative and representational codes that traditionally configure the expression war in the cinema – the war film as genre – and face, directly, the obscuring of the clarity of war's aims (so many visions of 'truth', 'justice' or 'injustice' in war) to present the 'landscape of war' as a form of 'sense'. This particular 'sense' is the uncanniness of war as the hidden inscription of violence in place of the narrative transformations of war. Avoiding the religious condemnation that is the 'Hell' of images, it turns on something like a reinscribed 'faith line' – a looking that returns the image as the measure of imminence and the threat of war: a conditional 'real' that is the legacy and the prophecy of so many theological or political signs. Finally, it is the interruption of so many representational symbols of war through the opening of a space that is, literally, the

‘landscape’ of war where landscape – in terms we can again derive from Nancy – is the ‘opening step’, the ‘measure of the picture’ that precedes and exceeds particular meanings (Nancy 2005: 62).

It also unravels Ricoeur’s symbolic movement from defilement through sin to guilt that has marked the development of the war film in recent years, to return the cinematic condition of war to something like the originary defilement or ‘stain’. These terms, as they have been mirrored and encoded into the war genre, have been rendered through mythic and narrative structures that articulate motifs and symbols of destiny and redemption, and the glorification of the body in war. Such motifs are also tied to the images of suffering, of death and transfiguration, the ‘just war’ and war as ‘hell’ to the most recent formula for guilt, the war crime and atrocity.

The images of the war film are equally integrated into aspects of ‘truth’ and ‘fiction’, from the experience of conflict, through the presentation of the enemy and the reasons for war, to the factual accounting of conflict and its crimes. These images operate extensively around the spectacular and the cinema’s ability to combine photographic verisimilitude with a deceptively ‘realistic’ illusion. The cinema has proved itself perfectly placed to technically render realistic depictions of the combat experience. This has led to a heightened tension between the documentary realism of the image and the mythic and paradigmatic structures its narratives assert.

The four examples below are chosen to draw attention to the particular relationship between the ‘realistic’ and the ‘mythic’ since each derives from source material based in eye-witness accounts: Francis Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979) drew on Michael Herr’s reportage accounts of the Vietnam War, published as *Dispatches*; Elim Klimov’s *Come and See* (1984) drew on oral and written testimonies of Nazi atrocities in Byelorussia during World War II that were collected and assembled by the film’s writer, Ales Adamovich; Terrence Malick’s *The Thin Red Line* (1998) is adapted from the novel by Pacific War veteran James Jones; whilst Brian De Palma’s *Redacted* (2008) is based on an historically documented war crime and assembles around it images drawn from reportage, internet traffic, and the personal videos of troops serving in the conflict in Iraq. These films will act as navigational markers through Ricoeur’s symbolic configuration and their particular use of symbolic structures serves to demonstrate how aspects of the war film are integrated with long-standing mythic, metaphysical and anthropological accounts of the rupture of human conflict that recall Ricoeur’s phases of ‘evil’. More than that, however, their recourse to the written word as the authentic ‘voice’ of conflict experience reiterates the point made in the

previous chapter regarding *Elephant*: that of the very failure of words under conditions of violence and the image, the ‘hell of images’ as the remainder of a ‘sense’ of war outside the judgements of spectacle or authenticity. Here Bruno Dumont’s *Flanders* testifies to the ‘interruption’ of those mythic paradigms with the images as its remainder. It retains the symbols of defilement but suspends the signs – of lamentation, recovery, or redemption – that instigate Ricoeur’s hermeneutic procedure. *Flanders*, then, following Jean-Luc Nancy, presents an hiatus in the narrative and destinal motifs of war, the glorification of the body in war, and the words that give war meaning. It opens a space onto the legacy of war as a ‘stain’, a mark in the exteriority of landscape and history and on the interiority of the subject, that is not particular or individual but conditional; again, as a ‘sense’ that opens onto the present limits of the ordinary and the unmarked. Rather than attempting to transform the experience of war, *Flanders* positions the locus of conflict as the hidden inscription in the landscape.

Flanders opens with the stillness of a farmyard in winter, cold and damp. Slowly, gradually, through a sequence of lengthy, static shots we are introduced to Demester, a young farmer, the surrounding countryside, and Barbe, a girl from the village. She asks him if he has received his letter. He is to leave on Monday. They have sex in a hedgerow. Drink beer with some friends. On Monday, Demester goes to war.

In opposition to the closure of meaning, of images given over to the words – to voice-over, to the authentication by testimony – it instead opens a single word out into landscape: the image and what it conjures spills out of the single word, the film’s title fixes this place, its landscape, to the region that is – by name – a memorialisation of the carnage of the First World War and its Western Front. Between the film’s title and the contemporary landscape depicted is a near century of war. But *Flanders* shows us nothing of the old war, the ‘war to end all wars’. It shows only desolate fields emptied of livestock, as if nothing could survive here – though it clearly must, since Demester, the hunter, sets snares in the woods. And it shows another war, a present war of sorts; one that takes place on ‘foreign’ (non-European) soil, in parched and barren desert. The war in *Flanders* clearly resounds with its historical present, beyond the world of the film, to the ‘real world’ with its conflicts in the heat and dust of Iraq and Afghanistan, in any of their phases since the First Gulf War of 1990-91. The image of columns of black smoke on the horizon remind us most clearly of that particular war, as documented in *Lessons of Darkness* (1992), and represented in *Jarhead* (2005), but nowhere are these conflicts mentioned by name. Rather, the

film's battle images are impressionistic, as much the images derived from war in the cinema, with only some assistance from historical photographs or the images of nightly television news. This is marked by anachronisms: the modern-clad soldiers in Kevlar body armour, shouldering assault rifles, filing through trenches and riding horses behind the tanks. There are echoes of the Great War too, in what little concern for a modern professional military the film offers us: instead, like the old 'pals' brigades', Demester and his comrades are conscripted from their village, collected in a truck, and sent to fight side by side in the same unit. There they proceed through the familiar episodes of modern war: colleagues are blown to pieces by landmines and shot dead by unseen guerrilla enemies. When they make their own first kill they find they have shot mere children, albeit child-soldiers wielding Kalashnikovs. They gang rape a woman, only to have that same woman exact judgement when they are captured. One of their number is then castrated and executed – notably the single man among them who did not physically participate in the rape, no doubt to consign the perpetrators to damnation twice over, to live, if they survive, with both the guilt of the rape and the death of their comrade. Though it may also serve as a provocative warning to those who look directly upon atrocity but refuse to protest.

Thereafter, the remaining two, Demester and Blondel – the rival for the affections of Barbe back home – escape, only for Blondel to be shot down in the process with Demester forced to leave him behind for reasons or motives that remain ambiguous. Blondel may or may not have been a rival for Barbe. She makes love to Blondel in an act of provocation toward Demester after he fails to confirm they are a couple in front of friends. Barbe discovers herself to be pregnant by him and has an abortion. She continues to have casual sexual relations during Demester and Blondel's absence, at the same time seemingly descending into depression. Eventually she is committed to a psychiatric hospital after suffering violent, hysterical outbursts. Her condition appears allusively linked to the experiences of the men abroad in conflict; a strangely mystical descent into madness that mirrors the men's descent into the bloodied violence of combat. On Demester's return she accuses him of abandoning Blondel, an accusation he admits. Barbe claims 'I was there. I know what you did!' All that Demester can offer is that 'It was hell out there'. It is unclear if this is the hell of war or the hell of the images of war.

There is a sense, in Barbe's apparent revelations, that Gance's dire warning has come true. There is no destiny or glory in the figure of the soldier, or in the act of war anymore. Demester does not return a hero. He cannot, since the modern war is always now a media war,

and every action, every atrocity or blunder occurs in the glaring light of a global media. Perhaps Barbe already knows because, like us, she has seen it all already. The war in *Flanders* is a composite of the images of a century of wars, from the opening trenches to the closing helicopter ‘medivac’ – from *J’accuse* (1919) to *Black Hawk Down* (2001). For Demester, the soldier, wars haven’t changed so much in a century. They are still some kind of hell, a sensory and sensuous experience of terror and elation, just as Ernst Jünger described – an accentuation of details that overwhelms and therefore blocks out, in its immediacy, the discursive or conceptual terms of war. The moment is the condition of things. Only the world has changed around the soldier so that wars are most clearly, consciously felt not as actual but as virtual experiences, remotely, at home. Demester returns alone from his nameless conflict to be judged for his actions. This is a stark reversal of the soldiers from Gance’s *J’accuse* who rise up from their deaths and return to their village to pass judgement on the living and to demand to know if their sacrifice has been in vain. It may well be that *J’accuse* and *Flanders* are the bookends to a century of wars – and war films – that follow the ‘war to end all wars’. There is a certain symmetry between them.

Both retain a *ménage à trois* at their centre. At the core of *J’accuse* is a romantic melodrama, very much of its time: a young woman, Edith, is married to the insensitive, brutal Laurin – country squire and hunter. She has a lover, the poet, Jean Diaz, who composes pastoral odes that he reads to his mother. Much like Demester, Laurin is unable to articulate his true feelings for her. So much so that he resorts to a crude physicality in the bedroom that amounts to rape. Though rape is only explicitly described as such later when Edith is the victim of the enemy, the German’s being depicted through expressionistic, spike-helmeted shadows looming over her cowering figure. Atrocity is clearly defined as the act of a faceless enemy. After which she disappears, sending a letter that claims she has been imprisoned. She returns, however, shortly before the end of the war with an infant in tow. Such a revelation is enough to drive her father to leave, unable to face a grandchild begotten in such a fashion. Laurin too, when he finally finds out about the child – hidden in the care of Diaz – admits he would have killed the child had he known of its existence. So much for melodrama in an age when a raped woman could be thought to have sinned.

The rape that occurs in *Flanders*, as in other recent depictions in war, encapsulates the century’s shift from a shorthand, propagandist indictment of a monstrous enemy to the locus of the wretched, de-humanising effects of warfare on the mentality and morals of one’s own side.

Rape as revenge occurs in Brian de Palma's recent *Redacted*, derived from a notorious incident that took place in the ongoing conflict in Iraq. There it serves also to motivate internecine rifts of class and social demography in the enclosed military structure – a fragmentation of the camaraderie myth that began to collapse amidst the chaos and vituperation of Vietnam.

The rape as it occurs in *J'accuse* remains very much a part of the film's opening reels, part-melodrama, part-propaganda: the lengthier but much less remarkable section of the film that has been surpassed in film history by the deservedly remembered final sequence in which the dead rise up to demand judgement on their sacrifice, famously given an additional poignancy by the subsequent knowledge that so many of the soldiers playing the dead returned to the trenches only to die "for real" in the final weeks of the war. Jay Winter has described Gance's film in detail, noting how these earlier reels remain very much a part of the wider cultural practice of the *images d'Epinal*, artworks produced for mass consumption that drew on popular, religious and even erotic sources to produce mythologising works that blended patriotism, sentimentality and propaganda (Winter 1998: 127). Winter goes on to describe how the final parts of Gance's film, however, make a radical leap into an altogether more visionary mode. Winter charts the four accusations at the heart of the film: the first at the German soldiers for the rape of his lover Edith; the second, at the German nation for causing a war that kills his mother. The war takes its toll. Laurin is mortally wounded and Diaz is driven insane. From his hospital bed he receives visions of the dead and returns to his village accusing the civilian population of venality and moral weakness, besmirching the trust and honour of the soldiers at war. Here the dead return to pass judgement on the living – who have been seen swindling the soldier's money and sleeping with their wives. The living are shocked into righteousness. But after this revelation, Diaz's madness is beyond help and he dies with a final accusation directed at the indifference of nature to human suffering, collapsing after raging at the sun. It is in the sudden change of register in the third reel that Gance elevates his film from the generic banality of the themes of love and jealousy amid enemy atrocity to a fully mythical, and Christological, emphasis on resurrection, redemption, death and sacrifice.

Apocalyptic, or the religiosity of condemnation, is given its most literal realisation in Rex Ingram's 1920 film, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Transplanting a story of family rivalry from Argentina (in Blasco Ibáñez's original novel) to Paris, it tells of two sisters who marry a Frenchman and a German respectively, right on the eve of war. Again, like *J'accuse*, the initial melodrama is given a radical, eternal twist by the introduction of a family friend, Tchernoff, a

Russian mystic who punctuates the film with his dire apocalyptic warnings lifted from Biblical Revelation and aided by visionary special effects (four Dürer inspired Horsemen of the Apocalypse riding through the clouds). Its dogmatic Biblical message is fully realised as the film closes with the caption: 'Peace has come – but the Four Horsemen will still ravage humanity – stirring unrest in the world until all hatred is dead and only love reigns in the heart of mankind' (in Winter 1998: 140).

Such Biblical rhetoric marks, as Anson Rabinbach suggests, the key thematic that distinguishes the aesthetic responses to the First World War from those of the Second: '[t]o put it in a convenient formula, World War I gave rise to reflections on death and transfiguration, World War II to reflections on evil, or on how the logic of modernity since the Enlightenment, with its legacy of progress, secularism, and rationalism, could not be exculpated from events that seemed to violate its ideals' (Rabinbach 1997: 9).

Alain Badiou has raised the stakes of the Christological emphasis in response to the Great War, claiming its inevitability on account of the Western world's Christian orientation and the violence, crucifixion and redemption of the Son of God in the order of 'Christian state power': 'How can we recover from such an inception? How can we move beyond the absolute violence of that commencement?' (Badiou 2007: 29). This he finds to be, in something of an 'end of history' formula, the defining crisis of the 20th century.

Badiou claims it is what comes to define the 'war to end all wars'. The dominant idea after the conflict of 1914-18 was that such butchery could only lead to the end of all wars, 'to a definitive peace' (Badiou 2007: 30). However, this is only one half of the equation. Underlying the consequence of such catastrophic violence as that of the First World War is the question of a superior violence. Such is the apocalyptic pronouncement: that such 'bad violence' must be overcome by a superior, essential violence. Within this Christological double-bind, then, '[t]hese two paths intertwine and confront one another, especially between 1918 and 1939. What dialectic is instituted by a bellicose inception? Is it the war/peace dialectic or the dialectic of good war/bad war, just war/unjust war?' (Badiou 2007: 30). Answering himself, Badiou finds the historical evidence in the Pétainism of inter-war French politics, 'the path of the "never again"'. By contrast, Nazi Germany sought the latter, 'a good war; an imperial, national and racial war' (Badiou 2007, 30). What, he asks, in this historical sequence, has become 'of the "Christly" promise of a new man?' (Badiou 2007: 31) and responds with a Nietzschean formula: the century is split between a

passive nihilism of renunciation, resignation, ('the lesser evil') and the other, Soviet, century (1917-1980s) inherits the active nihilism of a 'break with history' (Badiou 2007: 31).

Twentieth-century history becomes an essential disjunction, an entanglement that is not a dialectic since it is an irresolvable struggle but gives on to a particular violence. It is a violence that is not merely objective but also subjective: 'Violence takes place at the point of disjunction; it substitutes itself for a missing conjunction' (Badiou 2007: 32). In the 'Godless' century the 'new man' is bound up with destiny, and it is destiny that makes past humanity 'nothing but disposable material' (Badiou 2007: 32). From the 'inside' of such a destinal programme, which Badiou calls by the 'equivocal name of "communism"', barbarism becomes one with necessity, politics and morality are re-written under the signs of the epic and the heroic (Badiou 2007: 33). He draws parallels with the *Iliad* – 'an uninterrupted succession of massacres' – but a narrative, that is, nevertheless, read without regard for the objective signs of cruelty, but as epic and heroic: 'the force of the action overrides in its intensity any moral squeamishness' (Badiou 2007: 33). The subjectivity of war, distinct from the objectivity of its events, catastrophes, violence or atrocity, resides in the aestheticism of the 'epic feeling'; the struggle for a new beginning (Badiou 2007: 33). Inscribed into Badiou's axiomatic method, this same relation of destruction to the newly definitive is equally recognisable within the projects and manifestos of modernist art.

Badiou distinguishes this subjectivity from the Hegelian ('Napoleonic') sense of war as a constitutive moment in national consciousness. The twentieth century's extension of conflict to a global scale only serves to further emphasise the impossibility of an 'end', a totalisation or unity of the victorious. Destruction is managed, on the one hand, by the 'beauty of victorious heroism' (Badiou 2007: 36), on the other, by justification in battle. Conflict from World War Two onwards becomes war as 'an absolute cause that generates a new type of subject; a war that is also the creation of its combatant. In the end, war becomes a subjective paradigm'. This paradigm, in Badiou's axiomatic method, resides in the concept of the 'Two' – neither One (the unifying power of God) nor the Multiple (a harmony or balance of powers). Rather, it is a case of a subjectivity of decision. War is 'omnipresent' in the 20th century because it is the subjectivity of an anti-dialectical decision, an either/or (Badiou 2007: 37).

Despite Badiou's own personal antipathy to the 'deconstructive' concerns of 'undecidability', the 21st century's movement beyond this subjectivity of the Two and the reconfiguration of subjectivity to that evidenced by, as Nancy suggests, a 'being-outside-itself', an

exteriority, comes to the fore (in James 2006: 63). *Flanders* points towards an exteriority, to a landscape beyond and before the subjective criteria of its protagonists, and toward an irreducible state of 'sense' present but prior to the orders of the symbolic. The landscape is the state or place of war before it is its meaning.

Colin MacCabe charts the beginnings of this breakdown of the logic of decision in more succinctly generic characteristics than Badiou's abstracted formula. He argues, in a review written on the release of Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*, that the 'idea of individual martial heroism so crucial to western culture from Homer to Shakespeare' shifted in the latter half of the twentieth century to that of a 'democratic heroism' in which the citizen army, crossing class and social standing, becomes the locus for the collective resistance to a designated enemy (MacCabe 1999: 12). McCabe's comments coincide with an apogee in what Badiou would doubtless cite as the 'restoration' in cinema: a return to the subject of World War Two in terms of restitution and commemoration evidenced by Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and subsequently its spectacular television follow-up, *Band of Brothers* (2001). Spielberg's film indulges in the sentimental prologue and epilogue of a veteran's graveside memory as a means to proclaim relevance to audiences too young to feel the memorial gravitas of the Second World War. As MacCabe notes, the film's shift of emphasis from the 'struggle against fascism' to the central plot of locating the last remaining brother of the Ryan family only serves to demonstrate how far history has moved on from the original conflict (MacCabe 1999: 14). Terrence Malick's film operates within a very different framework, reflecting war as all-encompassing event, a mythic formula that presents an alternative strain of war film with a line of descent stemming from the apocalyptic aspects of the earliest films of Gance and Ingram, rather than from their melodramatics.

The shift from themes of death, sacrifice and transfiguration that followed the First World War to that of camaraderie occurred in isolated instances before 1939, especially in pacifist oriented proclamations such as Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), although as Jay Winter notes, this film has something of an American 'New World' persuasion, imploring 'Old World' nations to break down their enmities (Winter 1998: 132). Nevertheless, this film was one of very few to adopt such thematics. As MacCabe states, it was the Second World War that gave the greatest impetus to such themes, particularly in the decades from the 1940s to the

1960s in which the justness of the cause was still very much to the fore. In the West, it was Vietnam that put an end to that narrative simplicity.

MacCabe records that until Vietnam the US military had retained racially segregated units. Not only did the unpopularity of the Vietnam conflict within significant proportions of the American public undermine the 'justness' of the war as it came to be represented in films, particularly in the 1970s and 80s, but the appearance of racial and class issues within the military reflected those same issues as they came to a destabilising prominence within American society (MacCabe 1999: 14). Dominant American cinema did not, of course, do away with the certainties of traditional genre in its depiction of the conflict in Vietnam but a broader and more critical range of narratives began to appear. The loss of the 'justness', the certitude of moral ground for conflict, is the key aspect of post-Vietnam cinema, even if it only focuses on the military mentality in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), or on the treatment of veterans in Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). War films that focus on the de-humanising elements of military experience or the suffering and moral transgression of the military situation continue to the present. As well as *Redacted*, Nick Broomfield's *Battle for Haditha* (2007) recreates the inhuman atrocities of the military situation, again drawn from a documented case.

What MacCabe finds problematic in Malick's film is the return to the 'undivided' army, or common soldiery, and that the subject of war and the scene of battle is treated in something like a mythic or eternal sense. Therefore, MacCabe argues, it refuses the conditions of history and the present that should make a war film pertinent.

The dichotomy between the historical and the mythopoeic cuts to the heart of the aesthetic response to war and its violence. The examples of *Apocalypse Now*, *Come and See*, *The Thin Red Line*, and *Redacted* offer a brief plotting of the recourse to myth and the symbolic as a means to frame the raw data of historical testimony. Indeed, these examples are chosen not to be definitive but simply to illustrate the movement from defilement to guilt, in Ricoeur's terms, that the mythic/symbolic undergoes within the war genre. Moreover, each film treats the landscape of war as, itself, a mythopoeic element within its signifying formula. But it is the movement between the mythic and the realistic that will lead back to Bruno Dumont's *Flanders*, which, it will be argued, presents an 'interruption of myth' as a means to renegotiate the present in terms of conflict, of 'sense' as the non-representational real of experience; a turning away from war as destiny and an exteriority of an irreducible subjectivity.

MacCabe recalls that Samuel Fuller, director of several war movies and a WWII veteran, once stated that it was impossible to show the true horrors of modern warfare since the sheer bloody human carnage it creates would be impossible for any audience to watch (MacCabe 1999: 13). As a means to eschew the Lyotardian formula of the 'unpresentable' it may already be necessary to reconfigure the real away from its mnemonic trace to its sense of dread.

Ricoeur's development of defilement, sin and guilt has been reinscribed into the equivalent terms of the mythological, scriptural, metaphysical and anthropological by Richard Kearney. He has developed these terms in a similar hermeneutic recovery of meaning in response to the question of a 'radical evil' at the heart of the 'postmodern sublime', or, as Kearney notes, the impossibility of descriptive terms for the horror or monstrosity that transgress the limits of representation (Kearney 2003: 88). *Apocalypse Now*, *Come and See*, *The Thin Red Line*, and *Redacted*, can be seen to conform to each of Kearney's categories respectively. At the same time, they also each frame the glorification of the body and the question of human fate or destiny and set out their narratives within the movement of a journey through a specific landscape.

Francis Coppola's famous film of the Vietnam War, *Apocalypse Now* represents the case of the mythological, a point telegraphed within the film itself, given in the glimpse of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* amongst Colonel Kurtz's reading matter. Briefly, the film's fateful protagonist, Captain Willard, is ordered by the higher agency of military command to 'terminate' the scapegoat, the renegade Colonel Kurtz, who has, to all intents and purposes, relinquished subservience to the American government's war aims to pursue the fight with the freedom of his own initiative. Willard's journey, one of fate and destiny, merely throws him from one catastrophe to the next. A pattern takes shape, a series of ever more lurid, chaotic and repulsive situations unfold, ever more extreme and increasingly dislocating Willard from his own senses and his own sense of who he is and the logic and integrity of his mission. In the chaos of war innocent Vietnamese are massacred on a boat; a riot ensues as 'bunny girls' descend from helicopters; later, at the Do Lung bridge a leaderless contingent of traumatised, drug-hallucinating soldiers fire indiscriminately and hopelessly at an unseen enemy. In every incident all actors are mere pawns in the larger scheme of war. Origins and ends give way to an eternal chaos – the 'apocalypse now'.

War, here, is also strictly the preserve of humankind. The film's journey, its torturous path, remains a constant relation and occupation of people. The landscape of war is the continuous presence of the actions and debris of battle. The mystery of the dense jungle, for instance, is

always defiled by the wreck of a crashed B-52 bomber or the unexpected eruption of arrows from unseen but still present indigenous Indians. Indeed, in a scene re-installed to the later *Redux* edition (2000), a thick river fog serves only to reveal the presence of a French colonial family. When the landscape is framed in itself, devoid of the occupancy of war, it is subjected to the horror of burning, as perhaps befits a conflict that gave full vent to the strategy of 'defoliation'. It is this image that launches the film as both memory and flash-forward to the images voiced by Willard in his opening speech. This image of a sheet of fire, itself like a screen, alludes to the film's overall treatment of the surface images of war, the 'hell' or 'horror' of the images of war.

Recalling the terms of Ricoeur's 'defilement', the war itself presents a contamination, sublimated into the movement of doubling that drives the film; of Willard's loss of his own self and increasingly becoming Kurtz. The removal of this defilement and the return to a cosmological purity, or in the real-politic terms of the Vietnam conflict, a return to 'order' through facing the enemy and the demand for punishment that it confirmed in the sacrifice of the 'scapegoat'. This is played out in the face to face meeting of Willard and Kurtz that leads to Kurtz's murder, famously cross-cut with the indigenous Indians' sacrificial killing of a water buffalo. Likewise, this same cosmological structure of fate and destiny, of the contingency of Willard's destiny as the whim of 'divine necessity' – the logic of war or the abstract logic of the higher military command, is a re-inscription of Kearney's mythological structure derived from the cycles of origin and rebirth that also applies to the fate of bodies and the deification of the new after the death of the old. This latter manifests itself in Willard's emergence from the cave after killing Kurtz, as Kurtz's replica. Finally, in a further relation to Ricoeur's mythic criteria, it should be stressed that the story is recounted by Willard in voice over, his journey told after the fact as testimony. Despite the visual spectacle of the film's images, it is structurally related to the order of narrative, of the told rather than the seen.

Elim Klimov's film *Come and See* moves the structure into the realm of sin. We should recall that sin, in Ricoeur's terms, is the initial occasion of the realisation of a turning away from the concept of God. A recognition of a relation to the divine is initiated by the film's title, a reference to the Biblical apocalyptic of Revelation and the exhortation to witness the destruction of a fallen humanity. Klimov's film tells the story of Florya, an innocent who finds a gun and joins the partisans resisting the Nazi invasion of Belarus during the Second World War. Florya's journey involves his first sexual awakenings with a camp prostitute and the humiliation by authority when

he is left behind by the partisan army, his boots commandeered for an older man. Later he discovers himself to be orphaned, his family, along with his whole village murdered. Thereafter, he drifts, a mute witness to genocide. He is present at the massacre of a village, its population rounded up and locked in a church which is then burnt to the ground. Florya survives, even after having a gun put to his head. After this extended scene, Klimov throws the spectator, with the most violent of elliptical cuts, to the aftermath of the Nazi army's own annihilation in a partisan ambush. As the few surviving soldiers cower and plead for their lives, Florya, barely able to speak, is thrust forward as the agent of witnessing and of judgement upon whose gesture the Nazi's are to be condemned. But the redeeming intervention of wisdom is denied as the blurry distinction between revenge and justice succumbs to a chaotic, confused violence. Prematurely grey-haired, Florya turns to see himself replicated in a near-identical child – same clothes, same suitcase, trotting off on the heels of the partisan army. Left amid the detritus of battle Florya finally gets to fire his gun: at a portrait of Hitler lying trampled in the mud. This rupturing instant ignites a rapid rewind through archive film, driven by raucous martial music and the sound of Hitler's speeches, back through the Führer's rise to power in Germany, back to the image of Hitler as a child. Here the traumatised Florya pauses on the trigger. This final sequence, a jarring interruption to the movement of the film, stepping as it does outside of the film's own diegesis, restates the film's scriptural aspect with its emphasis of blame directed at the human, at the identification of the human called Hitler (the film's proposed title, according to Klimov, was originally *Kill Hitler*, Klimov (1999), but also in the image of birth: an emphasis placed on original sin and the human as Fallen.

Initially, *Come and See* reiterates the burden and suffering of a long journey in which Florya is at the mercy of the events, the fates, that befall him. However, the close of the film and the furious rewinding to the image of the child-Hitler speaks of despairing appeal to the origins of sin, there in the face of the child in a photograph. This is the question of the origin of sin that intersects with the mythological and cosmological formula of defilement to introduce the beginnings of human culpability. In Kearney's terms, this is the 'scriptural' (Kearney 2003: 84). Suffering remains the dominant force and is configured as a lament which the film aesthetically replicates in its unflinching account of madness and horror rendered as the continual framing of fully frontal faces, iconic images of the pain of suffering staring directly back at the film's viewer.

Nature and the landscape of war are inscribed into this narrative structure as a material part of the wider 'coming-of-age' trope that is linked to the child – a common thread in Soviet depictions of World War II, most notably realised in *Ivan's Childhood* (1962). With its dense, shadowy forests, gloomy swamps, evening glow and final, frozen woodland, *Come and See* places the landscape of war within the tropes of allegory, fable, even fairy-tale, a note that further emphasises the coming-of age theme of the film and the 'scriptural' aspect of a lesson. Accordingly, the destiny of the body remains caught within the allegorical configuration of fate: at the close, Florya, still a child in stature, has taken on the countenance of an old man with grey hair and a damaged face. Florya turns, and there behind him, about to run after the marching partisan column, is a new child recruit, and exact replica of himself.

The Thin Red Line, as already noted, moves the developmental structure one stage further on to the 'metaphysical'. In Ricoeur's configuration it remains locked to the formula of sin. However, it more clearly addresses the relation of sin to blame and human culpability. The film is set during the US-Japan conflict in Guadalcanal during World War II. The opening scene presents a series of images of natural history in the Pacific Islands. This is revealed as a microcosmic idyll of two American soldiers who have gone 'absent without leave'. Their recapture by the US Navy introduces the arrival of the massed American military forces about to mount an amphibious invasion of the islands. Thereafter, the journey made by 'C for Charlie Company' across the island from one battle to the next is punctuated by the persistent and inscrutable presence of the island itself – its flora, fauna and indigenous inhabitants. Multiple voiceovers from the different members of C for Charlie Company drift in and out, intermittently reflected in the subjective imagery, disconnected from the immediate event of the conflict and the action at hand. Overall, the film configures a conflict that, while acute in military detail, with the US and Japanese armies manoeuvring and fighting, is ultimately a meditation on the human and the natural world, of the resistance of nature to human intervention and destruction. Behind the sound and fury of the battle, the human trauma, violence, heroism, cowardice and sacrifice, is the impenetrable, silent, obstinacy of nature, its unspeakable, indifferent existence. When the Americans finally leave the islands, the last remaining image on the screen is that of a coconut shell lying at the waterline of the beach, sprouting new life.

In *The Thin Red Line*, the camera's clinical, near forensic examination of beauty and horror unfolds together with the thrust of narrative upheavals, constantly overlapping and undermining

the recognition of sense impressions in a pattern of suggestion. A pain-cum-pleasure ripples through the chorus of soldiers as they submerge their identities into the mass. Malick confronts his audience with the faceless military machine and its reliance on the depersonalisation of identity. The central exception is Private Witt, one of the two soldiers AWOL in the opening scene who, throughout the film, re-emerges as a figure resistant to command, shifting units according to his like or dislike of its commanding officers. Nevertheless, Malick returns to a Christological motif at the close in which it is Witt who sacrifices himself when he and a small group of comrades are ambushed by the enemy. In his final moments, he stares death calmly in the face and accepts his fate as the sacrifice for the safety of his comrades. In a metaphorical reference to the Christian split between body and soul, Witt's body is buried on the island. Standing over his grave, his company sergeant, Welsh, asks, 'Where is your spark now?' As the victorious Americans leave the island, it is Witt's voiceover that is heard from beyond the grave, 'Oh let my soul be in you now. Look out through my eyes, look out at the things you made, all things shining.'

Malick maintains conflict as a condition of things. The landscape of war is the totality of life, of nature itself. The opening images of an island paradise retain the presence of crocodiles slipping into water, vines entangled around trees. The film's opening words are 'What's this war in the heart of nature? Why does nature vie with itself, the land contend with the sea?' and the question is raised, 'Is there an avenging power in nature? Not one power, but two.' The beatific and the innocent in the persistent glittering sunlight, the iridescence and verdant foliage, the colours of flora and fauna, have their own dark side before the blood and dirt and filth of the human remains and the bomb-shattered battlefields intrude. Evil and violence is already in the world as the condition of things and then there is the condition of willed action, coming and going. It is this latter, the overlaying of human action – and specifically human destruction – onto the condition of nature that relates the structure back to what Kearney describes as the 'metaphysical' conditions of human culpability and blame initiated by Augustine and that places the speculative nature of 'evil' in the will of humans to do wrong (Kearney 2003: 85). Humanity redeems itself through its actions, like Witt, turning itself over, or back, to God.

The final category of 'guilt', or as Kearney rephrases it after Kant – the 'anthropological' (Kearney 2003: 87) – is epitomised in Brain De Palma's recent *Redacted*, set in Iraq and following a unit of US soldiers stationed in Baghdad. The anthropological recognises an aporetic of 'evil' but seeks to distance it from any cosmological, theological or metaphysical origins, turning it over

to contingency rather than necessity and therefore, into the hands of human nature. For Ricoeur, 'guilt' is principally coupled with confession: the recognition of sin. De Palma's film is a response to a documented atrocity and investigated war crime committed by US soldiers in Iraq.

In the film, the American unit guards a roadblock, patrols the city streets and kills time at their base. The narrative method used to piece together their 'story' places images and image-making at the fore, threading together the full range of image-gathering technologies that define the present conflict in Iraq: the soldiers' own home videos and internet communications; a French television news operation; camp CCTV cameras; insurgent web-broadcasts and internet posts and an omnipotent 'classical realist' film-making. The motive for such a collage of image-making is forcefully presented in the opening scenes with the proclamation that 'the first casualty of war is the truth'. Once again, this statement alludes to questions of contingency and guilt rather than necessity or fate.

In the course of the film, Iraqi civilians are murdered by mistake and a paternal sergeant is killed by a booby-trap bomb. All of which leads to the revenge attack by members of the unit on nearby civilians in which most of a family is murdered; the daughter also raped. A junior officer, unable to control the few renegade soldiers in his unit – and present but unable to prevent the revenge killing – is bullied into silence. Finally attempting to report the incident, he is put on trial by a belligerent military in denial. The film ends with a coda consisting of still photographs – war reportage – of dead and wounded Iraqi civilians, some clearly having been the 'models' for events and images in the film. The film proclaims, against its own movement, that the still image – the frozen instant from the aftermath of atrocity or violence – is the signature of 'truth'. It is the image that de-alienates the horror of conflict, a fragment of 'truth' as testimony in and of itself without recourse to the temporal exchange of before and after, which *Redacted* seeks, as the reconstruction of contingency over necessity, to assert.

At present, the war in Iraq continues. Unlike Vietnam, there is no historical outcome to reflect or re-imagine. *Redacted* is one of several recent war films, reflecting on-going conflicts, that replicate the change from the old 'just war' certainties to the uncertainties of the present and in so doing, have recourse to incidents rather than narrative arcs and guilt in place of destiny. *Battle for Haditha* (2007) equally selects an atrocity from Iraq as an incident for lament and outrage. *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) recounts atrocities committed during Israel's 1980 invasion of Lebanon through a soldier's guilty memories.

Redacted, in particular, insists that modern war is essentially a war of images against images and allocates truths to those participants who are silent whilst remaining unable to extend the question of 'mute witness' to its own practice, choosing its fragments as determined anchors for articulating judgmental causes and effects. The film would seem to endorse Gance's prophetic statement: war is the 'hell' of images.

The landscape of war that *Redacted* presents is less a place defined by the city and desert of its geographic location and more a question of the various textures of image that inter-relate to produce the environment of conflict: a space of video, CCTV, digital imagery, telecommunications and the apparatus of cinema and photography. It recalls Virilio's assertion of the space of war as that of the hyper-real and the speed of techno-telecommunications. However, cinema's debt to its own end, to its temporal structure, configures its images within a destinal framework, the sacrifice or redemption of its images to the inflections of mythic, redemptive relations. In this respect, *Redacted* attempts to re-inscribe the body as image and as death. The coda of still photographs of the dead and dying insists on death as the equivalent of truth as if the stillness of photography were somehow more 'truthful', more like the stillness of death, than the moving image.

What these few films demonstrate is the linear structure of cinema's dependence on certain mythic structures to condition the terms of violence and conflict where it is accepted that that conflict cannot be accounted for in traditional, psychologically realist terms. Where conflict touches on the sublime of experience, myth and symbol are evoked to contain it as form.

Flanders, by contrast, interrupts those myths and as such, points to a different interpretation of conflict and the motif of destiny. The film's dominant theme is defilement – in the sense of a 'stain' on the landscape. The title itself is synonymous with the collective, historical memory of the First World War that was fought upon and blighted the landscape that has now returned to a passive, sparsely populated rural topography. The image of the stain or mark recurs throughout the film: the first close-up of Demester is of his arm which he holds in pain, a large bruise distinct on the surface of the skin. Thereafter, there are close-ups of the earth being cut and turned by a plough and the trace of Barbe's footsteps in the frosted landscape. The literal stain of war, and of the First World War, is transposed in time and place to the desert, in its trenches, and again the mirrored close-ups of tank tracks and horses' hooves turning the sand.

Dumont's film both presents its symbols and withdraws the movement of their logic. Where history has shifted register, to a pervasive non-history, and a non-destiny, it has become instead, a circular memory trace. War and the images of war remain the same. Its iconography – from trenches to helicopters – can be interwoven. The images, effects, violence or numbed emotions of the soldier remain the same, as image. But without the specifics of history, the retrospective conflict, only the images pass over dislocated from the structures of meaning even where they are reconfigured as pagan myth (*Apocalypse Now*), protest and lament (*Come and See*), the sublime and the Christological (*The Thin Red Line*) or as the truth of images themselves (*Redacted*).

Flanders, as its title suggests, is a memory trace of war and its accompanying images. It does not specify any particular war as a means to root its events, narrative or characterisation in any 'real'; it is rather, the real as 'sense' of a world at war, a universal antagonism at the heart of the world. War is not contextualised by an historical fact (such as Vietnam, WWII, WWI, even specifically Iraq), there is no pretext for a 'just' war, or for a world of goals, aims, definable enemies.

The mystery of the violence and war in *Flanders* is reduced to a series of binary antagonisms that are both relentless and, at the same time, fold back upon themselves. War is the binary of stillness and fury – not as two representations of an aesthetic sublime, as in *The Thin Red Line* – but as the landscape of Northern France and that of an anonymous desert battlefield; the home front and the theatre of war; the anguish of the imagination for Barbe and the numbness of the violent encounters for Demester. The anachronisms and inconsistencies in the images of battle, the ambiguous instant of possible personal revenge between Demester and Blondel, are suggestive of a war in the mind, a male fantasy reconfigured in the unreality of the images of war. As an objective war it may never exist. The film refuses to consign its mystery to myth and its antagonism to cause and effect or the logic of articulation. It suspends its antagonism in the numbness of the masculine and the mystery of the feminine as the intersection of two extremes, echoed in the contradictions between landscapes and the experiences of violent rupture and becalmed emptiness. By the close, Barbe and Demester are together again; their actions replicating those at the beginning – a silent, stubborn, emotionless sex. In this emptiness is the hypostasis of the everyday that underlies the mystery of violence; an everydayness that suspends the destiny or sacrifice implicit in the heroism of war.

Finally, *Flanders* reduces its expression of war to a non-representational real of shared experience, that between Demester and Barbe. Theirs is the shared being of death and life – shared with Blondel too – that is shared bodily contact. Guilt confers itself at the close as Demester finally breaks down and admits to Barbe that he left the wounded Blondel to the enemy. However, Barbe has already proclaimed this, whether through intuition or mystery. Demester may only be confessing to what she demands. They lie prone together, framed in the interior darkness of a barn; in nothingness. The entire film has suspended them both in a sensory real that is, at the same time, insubstantial. It is a ‘sense’ suspended between memory, dream and hysteria. It leaves them together, having withdrawn any destiny or glorification, of the body or of meaning. The shared finitude of death and life is the real of the world with all its scars.

In the end, what remains is the image of the everyday poised under the shadow of the threat that is the ‘word’ – the name ‘Flanders’. It is the word, the symbolisation of meaning, that forms the threat and the dread that hangs over the everyday senses without revelation.

CHAPTER 7

Defilement: *The Asthenic Syndrome*; *Palms*; *Russian Ark*

The Introduction to this thesis outlined Kira Muratova's *The Asthenic Syndrome* and the dilemma posed by the critic Boris Vladimirsky, commenting from within a collapsing Soviet Union: that the film appears to not to believe in the possibility of salvation and yet, to feverishly seek it. The film's final image evokes the Christological symbol par excellence, the kenotic Nikolai, arms outstretched, prostrate and sleeping as a train carries him into the darkness of a tunnel – a 'tomb' or a 'cave' – with resurrection seemingly deferred. Such a movement into darkness is, at the same time, a loss of vision – in both senses: of the ability to see at all in the dark, and the loss of 'vision' as a teleology, the vision of the Soviet State, or, as implied by the chorus of old women lamenting Tolstoy at the opening of the film, a loss of the vision of art as a means to enlightenment.

This chapter aims to show how the notion of 'vision', that of sight and looking – the primordial element of the cinema – and its conceptual formula for a set of values, a future-oriented, teleological 'vision', is interrupted and withdrawn. Vision is torn away from the signifying criteria of language to leave only the look. The language of the Soviet Union, its culture, politics and symbols, is exhausted, leaving only the visible and its obscuring remaining in vision. It is the suspension and withdrawal of vision that ultimately defers any conclusive meaning in Muratova's film as it does to, in differing stylistic terms, in Artur Aristakisyan's *Palms*. Both films were produced during the political, social and physical collapse of the former Soviet Union, a state whose own 'vision' was suddenly obscured and withdrawn. Sokurov's *Russian Ark* was made some years later but nevertheless expresses a tension between vision as an idea of culture, of values and of history, and the obscuring of that vision in the Russian nation's reorientation towards a dominant Europe. In short, this chapter aims to show how each of these films reorients the cinematic 'look' away from a representation of values, or vision as meaning or counter-meaning, to one of the tension between presentation and withdrawal – a 'sense', after Jean-Luc Nancy, of the very condition of the obscuring of vision in experiential terms.

Questions of wretchedness, suffering, violence and the possibility of redemption, of 'defilement', 'sin' and salvation, impress themselves upon each of these films as a sense of turning

away, the loss of vision in the present of certain defining aspects of history, teleology and future. They point to the transition, in Ricoeur's development, from 'defilement' toward 'sin': *The Asthenic Syndrome* and *Palms* both express the visual stain of violence, suffering, abandonment and wretchedness through the present conditions of social collapse within the Soviet Union. *Russian Ark* evokes the spectre of the 'wasted' revolutionary century that hangs imminently over the Hermitage museum and the legacy of the cultural artefacts it contains. At the same time, each film poses the question of a turning away from the transcendent, whether God, art, culture or the 'spirit'. This turning away presents itself as the loss of vision, both literally and metaphorically.

Western culture is one of light and vision. Both act as a well-established allegory or metaphor dating back, at least, to Plato's cave. Darkness, therefore, has been established as its opposite, an absence, ignorance, death or nothingness. In the fragment that begins *The Asthenic Syndrome*, the black and white section that follows the nurse, Natasha, in the immediate wake of the funeral of her husband, her opening lines are 'Go to hell, all of you' – an aggressive, anguished outburst not to the dead but to the living, the mourners at her husband's funeral who seem not to feel the loss in the way that she does.

Framed in such away – from an intimation of hell to the plunge into darkness – *The Asthenic Syndrome* offers very little on which to hang the possibility of salvation. Though, as a film from Russia, it is perhaps not altogether appropriate to consign its imagery, its light and dark, entirely to a Western metaphysics, since Russia lies on the cusp between a West and an East, not fully consigned to a place in a Western (European) geography – a point of discomfort raised specifically in Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark*. There is, to stretch the point somewhat, a formula more prominent in the Eastern church, of anastasis. It describes the descent into hell of the risen Christ, a journey made in order to rescue the fallen Adam, the symbol of humanity, from his grave (in Court 2007, 11). Perhaps then, the kenotic Nikolai is not so much the Christ crucified, heading for the tomb, as the Christ that first awakes at the beginning of the second section of the film, in the 'tomb' of the cinema from which he embarks on his narcoleptic journey through the rest of the film, its chaos, violence and 'hell', in a bid to wake 'humanity'. Such a reading would seem to invest too much in the scant symbolism of images – as do light and dark as knowledge and ignorance, something and nothing. Hegel pointed to the more crucial ambiguity of this relationship:

Something can be distinguished only in determinate light or darkness (light is determined by darkness and so is darkened light, and darkness is determined by light, is illuminated darkness), and for this reason, that it is only darkened light and illuminated darkness which have within themselves the moment of difference and are, therefore, *determinate* being (in Stoichita 1997: 8).

The plunge into darkness at the end of *The Asthenic Syndrome* is not, in this sense, a plunge into nothingness, or even 'hell', but a suspension of the 'look', of the ability to see, a movement into obscurity.

However, it is possible that this plunge into darkness or obscurity is a 'vision', or dream, of Nikolai's. Prior to this sequence on the train, Nikolai has been shown consigned to a mental ward in a hospital, the culmination of a sequence that cuts together school children in a classroom with caged dogs in a pound. Jane Taubman has referred this sequence to its original intentions in a shooting script for which Nikolai's incarceration is directly linked to an acknowledged dream sequence of escape, out into a blinding snowstorm (Taubman 2005: 57). In the film as it was finally released, such a dream is more ambiguous. A nurse comes to close the windows in Nikolai's room, seemingly, in Taubman's reading, a pointer to sleep and, therefore, to dreams. This is immediately followed by the visit to Nikolai of his student lover, Masha, and her friend, intent on helping him escape. Once outside, in the grounds of the hospital, they pass a statue of Ivan Pavlov, renowned scientist of reflex action and aggressive instincts, before a sudden cut to the final scene aboard a train. A nameless female traveller, well turned out, looks directly at the camera and screams abusive foul language (the scene for which the film conflicted with the State censors). Beside her, another nameless traveller sleeps through her tirade as if Nikolai's condition of exhaustion is pandemic. Elsewhere on the train, Nikolai and Masha are in deep embrace, until Nikolai falls backwards to the floor, fast asleep. Unable to wake him, Masha flees the train that carries Nikolai into the dark tunnel.

This final sequence epitomises the film's overall technique. There is no adequate means to define the motivation of shots, their points-of-view, their status as objective or subjective. The images in the classroom, organised and filmed as fiction, are cut against images taken of a city dog pound, that is, documentary images in the most basic sense. All of the *The Asthenic Syndrome* is a constant accumulation of such images, whose motivation and articulation is ambiguous, not

necessarily linked by narrative or cause and effect, merely by circumstance – as moments in a collapsing Soviet milieu. Articulation is relegated to a secondary status behind the more primary function of looking, observing, accounting for, and declaring evident. The film, both films – the black and white film of Natasha and the colour film of Nikolai – are an assembly of ‘looks’ directed at a disintegrating Moscow, and from time to time, the disintegrating Moscow looks directly back, and shouts and screams. The climax presents a double exhaustion: the physical exhaustion of Nikolai, and the exhaustion of the ‘look’, toward darkness and obscurity as respite from the violence and debasement of the light. The look has no ‘values’ attributed to it, in terms of ‘meaning’ derived from action and reaction or the logic of interpretation, only a look that carries itself into obscurity rather than the light of some reconciliation or future perfection.

The Asthenic Syndrome is a film about ends made from the midst of a collapse that had not itself entirely ended. The opening section, the ‘Natasha film’, does not equate to a narrative in its own right. Only when this black and white section ends is it revealed as a film being projected in a cinema and as such, having not witnessed its opening titles, we might assume it is the latter part of a film already in progress. In itself, it recounts a series of instances related to a nurse, Natasha, in the immediate aftermath of her husband’s funeral. We have seen her abuse her fellow mourners. Thereafter, she walks home alone, screaming curses and insults at passers-by in the street. At home, she smashes a wine glass. She visits the hospital where she works and abuses the staff. Returning home she picks up a drunk from the street, takes him home, undresses him in full view of her neighbours and takes him to bed, only to break into hysterical tears and throw him out. Later, back on the street, a young woman tells her she has a mark on her coat. Natasha and the woman try to clean the coat. Seemingly becalmed, Natasha for once does not insult her but stares directly into the camera: a face of lamentation. A shot of a projector beam reveals this sequence as a film. The lights in the auditorium go up. Throughout, this sequence, Natasha’s brief, fragmented moments of anguish are punctuated by the images of death: the cemetery, her husband’s burial, the photographs of the dead set into Russian graves, the photographs of people in a photographer’s window – the bureaucratic identification of a political system in its death throes.

This sequence, like the colour sequence of Nikolai that follows, has no dramaturgical structure, no character arcs or ‘emplotted’ events. Both are configured from an exposure to fragments, moments, instances, simply an accumulation of sense impressions linked by association. In that respect they have no tension in the dramatic formula, only suspense and the

question mark of 'ends' – how long could such an accumulation go on for; what could possibly end it? Natasha's sequence is ended by the rupturing revelation that it is a film within a film. When the lights go up, a disgruntled audience shuffles away grumbling about its gloomy content and ignoring the attempts of a master of ceremonies to engage them in a discussion of the film in the old Soviet style; a moment played for irony, as the master proclaims the 'powerlessness of the most masterful art before the enigma of artless reality' (Taubman 2005: 51). But the obligations to State control no longer hold up. A sleeping Nikolai and a detachment of Red Guards awaiting the order to leave are all that remain, until they too file out, waking Nikolai.

Thereafter, the film follows him through a sequential assembly of moments: at the school where he works, a teacher unable to maintain effective control of his class; seeking refuge in a lecture theatre full of redundant busts of Lenin; at home with his wife and mother-in-law. At school he delivers speeches in both Russian and English – a fleeting anticipation of the 'new world order' to which Russia may be forced to submit. The sequences of Nikolai are countered by others that depict characters unrelated either to him or to the events so far witnessed. Rather they form fragments of the accumulation of instances from the public and the private. Jane Taubman has noted, with a degree of reservation, the tension within these images – redolent with religious symbolism despite Muratova's own admission to being an 'unbeliever' (Taubman 2005: 54). Nevertheless, such framing retains this fundamental tension, as Taubman identifies: 'In a sense, Muratova's film, composed of loosely connected scenes, is itself like an iconostasis, the wall of icons mounted at the front of the church sanctuary'. But as Taubman concludes, these images constantly thwart the sacred with the profane: 'her images are negative, anti-iconic, rather than positive.' And, giving the example of Nikolai at home: 'The trinity surrounding the table breaks into an ugly family quarrel' (Taubman 2005: 55).

Two further sequences reiterate this iconostasis on the borders of the sacred and profane. Nikolai again falls asleep in the midst of a teacher's meeting and a young people's bohemian party. In the latter, naked figures both women and men, pose in static tableaux or gaze directly into the camera, reiterating both the iconic and the confrontational, accusing formula of direct address the film adopts throughout. As, once again, Nikolai falls asleep, it is unclear if these images are objective events taking place within the context of the party or subjective images of Nikolai's dreaming state.

In this second half of the film, Nikolai is cast in terms reminiscent of the 'visionary' of apocalyptic literature, the mystical seer not uncommon to Russian tradition (caricatured with Tchernoff), yet the motivational or prophetic formula for such visions is persistently clouded in the obscurity of non-articulation. All that remains is the look, the exposure by the camera, the film's persistent looking. As if to add a further layer to the overall irony in this scene, Muratova here uses Schubert's 'Unfinished' symphony. The teacher's meeting, during which Nikolai again succumbs to sleep, snoring loudly, takes place in the midst of a chaotic, out-of-control, school. Children pull faces at the windows of the meeting room. This is cut with the images of the dog pound where a secretary has come in search of the missing school mascot. Amidst the caged and condemned dogs Muratova poses her most provocative slogan directly to the audience that re-emphasises the raw essence of looking: 'People don't like to look at this...' Thereafter, Nikolai is found to be in the hospital mental ward from where he will arrive, prostrate on a train, heading for the obscurity of the darkened tunnel.

Ultimately, however, as the train and Nikolai descend into the tunnel, the camera remains, its watchful presence allowing the train to recede from view. Furthermore, the state of sleep is a suspension of ends, as befits a film that is in immediate dialogue with, and an exposure of, a condition not yet ended. It is not a death, in the modernist manner – of Godard or Wenders. The darkness is, in this sense, the necessary obscurity of the look where such obscurity is a crucial presupposition of the nature of looking – of being – out of which sight may emerge. In this respect it is the only possible 'end' for *The Asthenic Syndrome*, whose looking at the perversity and contradiction of human experience cut off from the traditional, historical, rhetorical formula for redemptive reconciliation could go on looking indefinitely. Only a change in Russia itself could redirect, or negate the necessity of the look. Since the film must end before Russia ends, it can only emphasise the obscurity, exhaust the look, as a limit but not an end. And it also recognises darkness and obscurity – but not that of death – and the need to look harder, to strain the look, as a means to see at all.

Under the circumstances of the collapse of the Soviet State, seeing into darkness may be an understandable trope. It recurs in Artur Aristakysyan's remarkable film *Palms*. Though released in 1993, its images – an accumulation of silent, black and white documentary sequences of beggars and slum-dwellers on the streets of Kishinev, Moldavia – was recorded in 1990, an acknowledgement made in an opening caption. The film is narrated by the film-maker, in an

apocalyptic, symbolist, quasi-religious visionary address, that is also, principally, a statement directed to his unborn son. Its opening lines conclude with, 'My little son, I'm closing my eyes to see you'.

The film is a counterpoint of 'visions': the vision of the mystical kind, the rhetoric of the narrator brimming with the obscurely poetic – part parable, part political manifesto – is a response to the starker 'vision' of mere looking. The narration is a reaction to the raw data of what has been silently filmed in situ – the life lived on the streets of Kishinev, witnessed by the camera. Moreover, the people that the camera seeks out and looks upon are those that the broader society would regard as the invisible people – precisely those that live on the margins of society, unemployed, without or with only the bare minimum of housing or possessions. At the same time, the camera is indefatigable and relentless in its looking: the wider community of Kishinev, the workers, shoppers, those conforming or adapted to what the narrative calls 'the System', are only ever glimpsed in the most fleeting fashion – as background figures or shadows, as passing legs and feet and the logos of sports shoes or shopping bags. So many of the camera angles, its positions and points of view are stooped, low, or aimed at the ground – without horizon – since so many of those that the camera records are bent over, hobbling, face-to-the-ground, or legless on make-shift trolleys, or seated in doorways or shacks.

Although the city of Kishinev is named, it is not represented or defined in any spatial or topographical sense. There are no establishing shots to locate the beggars, no placing of the beggars and disenfranchised within a broader context of areas or ghettos set apart from the rest of the city. The beggars are simply amongst the people, within the city. Their status is not defined in relation to the city – their numbers, circumstances or their relationship to the city and its treatment of them. They are figures, bodies – many broken, maimed, disfigured – at once parasitic and resistant. Equally there is no trajectory, no journey undertaken by these figures; no consequences to be confronted or achieved by them or by the city either on their behalf or against them. The images of the beggars are no different at the end of the film than they are at the beginning. That is, their context, framing or articulation reveals no change, no secret, no reflection; neither do they alter their relation to the narration. They merely accumulate numerical evidence, or variations on a theme of obstinate being there. The fact that the images are all recorded mute accentuates a certain timelessness and mystery. Often, those filmed speak soundless words to the camera; at other times, aware of the camera, they simply stare back. This

mute status is disconcerting in a film shot in 1990; it seems to echo a different era, since synchronised sound is so taken for granted, an audio realism implicit in any visual realism. It evokes a time that is 'out of joint', so-to-speak, images of ghosts and spectres, those figures so memorably evoked by another Russian, Maxim Gorky, who reside in the 'kingdom of shadows' (in Taylor & Christie 1988: 25).

The simple vision of the seen in *Palms* is then overlaid with the visionary rhetoric of the address to the film-maker's unborn son. The text is dense and constant for all of the film's one hundred and forty minutes. It is divided into two parts and ten chapters that are each not so much episodic or narrative as addressing the central themes and particular images from a different direction. Most of Part One operates around a description of a particular figure: fanciful, poetic, and laced with violence. They are parable-like synopses of suffering or resilience, of catastrophe or else a passive, immovable patience. There is a woman who, we are told, has been lying on the ground for forty years; an old man who collects discarded clothes and hoards them – the clothes of the dead. There is 'Pithecanthropus', a 'prehistoric man' in a hospital ward who is said to have 'gnawed through his own veins'; and the families that live in the 'swamp' – a shanty-town of hovels in the midst of flooded ground. There is 'George the Victor', a beggar with no hands who has mastered the art of lighting and smoking a cigarette using only the stumps of his arms; and 'King Oswald', the legless man who scoots between the citizens of the 'System' on his trolley. There is 'Yazundokta', an old woman dragging a box: in it, the narrator tells us, is the head of the jailer who abused her in prison. Then there is the blind boy who thinks all people are blind since that is what his blind parents told him, and since the parents are blind too, the boy can only wait until they chance upon his existence. Part Two shifts register: the same figures recur and a few more are introduced, but the narrator reverts to the challenge to the System outlined in Part One, the challenge mounted by the existence of the beggars.

The System has no particular identity or values; it is referred to only as 'the System'. Whether it stands for the collapsing Soviet State, for the mercantile, globalised economy threatening to replace the State; whether it is political, social, religious, or all of these things is of little consequence to those looked at in the film who are deprived of any currency within such specifics. The System seems greater, more encompassing than all these things – it hints at some formula for existence, for being, perhaps an inauthentic being: since the narrator tells his unborn son, '[i]t has established an order of things in which you or I do not exist [...] There is only the

law which exists for us, the law of blood, the law of fine matter' (Chapter III). Moreover, the System is a kind of 'biopolitics': 'Our blood, yours and mine, is the sacred axis of the whole system. The laws of dialectics deal with it. [...] According to these laws the system is a great biomass, and a human being is a number of its chances' (Chapter III). At the same time, the System may be that which has replaced history, an end of history: 'What's left is to learn the language of birds, and become a social outcast, because the writers have used up all the words' (Chapter IV); or, 'Time has come into its final shape. [...] It's no longer possible to dissent, there is no point, because the system will absorb everything that has a meaning' (Chapter V). The image of the beggar, the narrator tells us, is the disturbance and excess that escapes the System: 'Remember, the image of the pauper is always ahead of the system' (Chapter VIII). Distress and suffering is always in excess of meaning.

It is this last perspective that is referred back to an overall Christological emphasis within the symbolism the narrator uses. The film opens with a reference to the outlawing of Christians by the Emperor Nero, a moment imagined through the flickering of archive silent film: Biblical extravaganzas from the primordial days of cinema – all frenzied theatrical gestures as the Christians are sacrificed to the lions. A film caption then informs us we are, thereafter, in Kishinev, 'Year 1990 after the birth of Christ'. The System's weakness is its excess, its supplement or remains. This is the weight given to the beggars, the 'paupers', as a messianic persistence in suffering; a passivity and silent testimony to rejection and indifference; above all, a spirituality through an 'invisible' presence of those at the margins. However, here there is no messianic figure to come. Salvation is attributed to madness and to spirit: 'The first way to reach salvation is to go mad' (Chapter I); and 'now it's becoming clear that to become a dissident, one has to go mad first' (Part Two); 'Either a person lives in the spirit and leaves the system [...] or identifies oneself with the system and becomes its follower, its slave, forever'. Salvation and resistance are one and the same, personified in those that have no place in the System and are remnants from it: 'Those who didn't have a place on Earth would come here to live' describes the derelict remains of an asylum (Chapter I).

The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has gone to considerable lengths to develop a political significance for the 'remnant' derived from an original Judaeo-Christian root. According to Agamben, the concept of the remnant is not measured by majorities or minorities, by oppositions between those that belong to a particular mechanism and those that oppose it, but 'the

people' as a concept is defined precisely by those that cannot be reduced to a majority or a minority, a norm or an exception, but simply as a 'substantiality assumed by a people in a decisive moment' (Agamben 2005: 57), a point he claims is pronounced by Foucault when he identifies a people as 'part of those who have no part' – 'the bearer of a wrong which establishes democracy as a "community of dispute"' (in Agamben 2005: 58). And as Agamben has asserted elsewhere, that substantiality assumes itself first and foremost as a witness; a having witnessed through experience (Agamben 1999: 162). In the first place there is, necessarily, recognition through an exposure, a look.

In a further rhetorical hint at the scriptural or spiritual, each chapter unfolds as something closer to a parable than a fable or an allegory, that is, as intimations of spiritual lessons rather than 'moral' discourse. Moreover, each parabolic chapter forms one part of the accumulated parable of the overall film. The parable is distinct from the fable in the sense of its refusal to state an overall lesson. Each chapter in *Palms* is closer to a fragment – complete and incomplete. The images remain in stark contrast to the descriptive terms employed by the narrator. In a recent essay, Jean-Luc Nancy has singled out the role of the parable, distinct from the allegory, in terms that reiterate the relationship that *Palms* promotes between what is said and what is seen, the double-meaning of 'vision', as first and foremost, 'sense'.

Crucially, in Nancy's interpretation of the parable, it is distinct from an allegory in one key aspect: 'It does not proceed out of a pedagogy of figuration (of allegory or illustration) but, to the contrary, out of a refusal or a denial of pedagogy' (Nancy 2008c: 5). This is because, when Jesus is asked by his disciples to explain his use of parables he tells them they are meant for those who 'seeing, see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand' (in Nancy 2008c: 5). This same phrase, says Nancy is used elsewhere in both the Old and New Testaments in reference to the cult of 'idols', which should not be seen as a condemnation of the production of images of the divine but a condemnation of those who 'do not first welcome sight into themselves prior to all that is visible' (Nancy 2008c: 6); in short, one must always already be prepared to receive, to have the 'receptive disposition' as Nancy calls it: 'This is not a religious mystery; it is the condition of receptivity itself, of sensibility and of sense in general' (Nancy 2008c: 6). Nancy resists identifying the parable with a lesson that can be taught and learnt. Rather, it draws out of the 'receptive disposition' a notion that the parable describes something that cannot be learnt since one must already be receptive the message. It is in this sense that Nancy is able elsewhere (in

The Ground of the Image) to extract the religious from the 'scred' to identify it with the image in art (Nancy 2005: 1): to crudely paraphrase, *you either get it or you don't*. Such is the parabolic language of the narrator's address: 'My little son, I am closing my eyes to see you'. The descriptions of the beggars and 'paupers' on the streets of Kishinev, contained in the mute data of images, are not allegories for another way of thinking or fables with a lesson in themselves. Rather the invitation is to look and see and test 'receptivity' against pathos, horror, indignation, resentment, against the 'System'.

Nancy continues: this particular receptivity should not be equated with the narrow, proprietary religious formula that reserves such 'sight' for a chosen minority. It is not, in more moderate religious terms, a call to further research into its meaning either. It is, says Nancy, 'immediately correlative' – when facing the image there is either a vision or a blindness (Nancy 2008c: 7). Here we find Nancy reiterating his wider configuration of 'sense' as the simultaneous excess and suspense of representation. The parable is not related to a 'figure' – a representative meaning, nor an 'appearance', a mimetic relation to reality. 'Between the image and sight, then, there is not imitation but participation and penetration' (Nancy 2008c: 7). We can recall this same expression, with respect to 'regard' in Nancy's text on the cinema of Kiarostami: 'Here the look enters space; it is a penetration before it is a consideration or a contemplation' (Nancy 2001: 14). Through this excess of the visible and the invisible, the visible without clearly defined meaning, Nancy makes the initial, tentative but suggestive, connection between the parable and 'perhaps' all modern art: 'There is no "message" without there first being – or, more subtly, without there also being in the message itself – an address to a capacity or an aptitude for listening' (Nancy 2008, 8) – or looking. By extension then, the image – and especially the image in *Palms* – does not represent a regulatory principle or a value or a relation between images: they exist, as Nancy says of the parable, as an excess that evokes only 'its provenance or [...] its address' (Nancy 2008c: 9). Each image, each sequence of evidence, is present and of itself, one after another. Together they are seeking the one who has the ability, the 'receptive disposition' to recognise them. The narrator then aims his address at his unborn son: the images await the one who can see them for what they are. It is not a waiting for some figure or concept that will redeem, correct or reconcile these images. It is only a wait for the proper witness, which is, in itself, a restating of the singular configuration of the 'look' – not as recognition of a representation but as a challenge to the obscurity that always remains in presentation. The narrator tells his unborn son, 'And while you

are on this earth, just watch. [...] The time will come when people will extract new words from your silence.' The violence, suffering and degradation inherent in *Palms* do not constitute nihilism or an apocalypse. The film is addressed to the future. However, like *The Asthenic Syndrome*, this future is tentative and may well be more of the same. There is no figure or formula for restitution, reconciliation or redemption, but there remains a demand. Where *The Asthenic Syndrome* evokes an exhortation of sorts – 'People don't like to look at this', but nevertheless I am making you look – *Palms* is more of a warning: do not be distracted by so many values and meanings of the System – its 'laws', 'dialectics', 'consumption' – simply make sure, first, that you are able to see what is obscured in its midst.

Vision, sight and darkness occur again at the beginning of Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark*. Over a black screen the narrator begins, 'I open my eyes and I see nothing'. The film begins with a violent occurrence, an 'accident' the narrator tells us, that delivers him into the midst of the nineteenth century through pouring into the Hermitage museum. These same characters reappear at the close attending a lavish ball in 1913, close to the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Between this beginning and end *Russian Ark* tours the galleries and rooms of the great pre-Revolutionary architectural and cultural edifice, peering at artworks and glimpsing reconstructed fragments of history, all – famously – in a single continuous shot. Much debate on the film's release centred on its ambiguous evocation of the pre-Revolutionary era: was it a celebration, lament or critique of all things pre-Revolutionary, pro-Romanov and anti-Bolshevik? Ian Christie noted the inevitability of these reservations since the twentieth century casts all art, especially Russian, as ideology. But, as Christie concludes, Sokurov is 'neither judging nor attempting to persuade', likening Sokurov's self-imposed task to a certain, more humble, and especially 'Russian' perspective beloved of the Symbolists that sees art as 'a sacred gift handed down through the generations'. 'The emphasis is on keeping faith and doing one's duty rather than striving for originality or fame' (Christie 2003: 10) – which may seem contradictory in respect of a film of such technical bravura and brilliance. Wherein lies the film's greatest conundrum: why would a film that sets out to reflect one of the world's greatest collections of cultural and artistic artefacts demand such a unique and restrictive formal technique?

The sheer force of this ninety-six minute continuous take impressed itself into every review of the film on its release. Many reviews succumb to this force, imagining the intricate choreography going on behind the camera, the exacting standards of preparation the film must

necessarily have required, and, most commonly, the reflexive condition of the possibility of failure, the contemplation of the consequences of mistakes by cast, crew or technical equipment. This is given an added frisson by the knowledge, privileged to critics, that Sokurov was allowed only one day in the famous museum to accomplish his project. Other reviews object that there is nothing intrinsic to the film's content that would be different if the film were shot and edited in the 'usual' manner, since, if one is intent on focusing on the relations between the paintings, people and historical 'moments' the film refers to, there is no analysis or overarching idea to which these fragments conform; no obvious story to be told or interpretation to be deduced (in Ebert 2003). Other critics, particularly those with a greater knowledge of Russian history, gloss the technique to contemplate the film's various fleeting references – Catherine the Great, the Romanovs, the poet Pushkin, a visit by an Arabic envoy, the briefest of glimpses of the Hermitage in the twentieth century as coffins are constructed during the siege of 'Leningrad'. Then there are the contemporary points of reference: the blind nun and art critic who describes paintings, the uninterested sailors wandering on shore leave, interrupting Mikhail Piotrovsky, the Hermitage director. Most crucially, there is the figure of the Marquis de Custine, the nineteenth century French diplomat who converses with the unseen narrator, voiced by Sokurov himself. This latter dialogue predominates and formulates the locus of the film's preoccupation with the status of Russia in relation to Europe, geographically, culturally, artistically. However, as Julian Graffy observed, '[t]heir views of Russia and its place in Europe are never fully reconciled and both are revealed to be partial' (Graffy 2003: 53).

The Marquis is a deliberate signal for this tension or antagonism between Russia and Europe – a 'real-life' historical character who wrote a travelogue, *Russia in 1839*, and kept company in the artistic and literary salons of his day alongside Balzac, Stendhal and Hugo. In a room full of neo-classical sculpture he baits the narrator: 'Why do you find it necessary to embrace European culture? For what reason? Why borrow also Europe's mistakes?' In a lengthy corridor full of reproductions of Vatican frescos he chides, 'Russians are so talented at copying! Why? Because you don't have ideas of your own. Your authorities don't want you to have them.' Elsewhere, Custine teases the narrator over Pushkin – 'Nothing special'; 'I'm sorry if I've offended your nationalist sympathy.' Custine, a ghost-figure trapped in his own era, knows nothing of the twentieth century. When he hears of a revolution he congratulates himself on

foreseeing disaster: 'I have never believed that a republic was suitable for a country as large as Russia', to which the narrator jibes: 'You Europeans are democrats who mourn the monarchy'.

This Russo-European legacy is played out further in respect of the museum's art collection, gathered by a Russian aristocracy that epitomised cultural patronage and political terror. A court spy trails the narrator and Custine throughout. It is the legacy of art, collected from across Europe – Italian painting and sculpture, works by the Flemish Masters – accumulated by a monarchy intent on securing a parity with, even perhaps surpassing, the established houses of Europe. The film retains an ambiguity toward this exercise: the accumulation of 'culture' is both a cause for celebrating a wider European creativity and a Russian appreciative sensibility and it is a testament to power and imperial prestige.

However, the fusion of western European art and vignettes of a kaleidoscopic Russian history prompts a relationship between culture and history that transcends the particular, seeming to intuit an essential, or eternal, relationship between the two. Ian Christie quotes from an interview with Sokurov on this point: 'Who would we be if not for museums? Museums are not about preserving the past, they're about preserving the future. If we don't begin to appreciate the achievements of European civilisation today, tomorrow we're going to lose it' (in Christie 2003: 10). Coupled with the dark picture of the twentieth century glimpsed in the frame hall doubling as a morgue and coffin shop, and the reference to the Soviet era as the 'wasted twentieth century', it is understandable that some critics would detect a hint of mawkish nostalgia. From a cinematic perspective one may be even inclined to detect in the director's resistance to the cut, to montage, a resistance to the defining characteristic and innovation of the Soviet cinema to follow with the revolution.

Tim Harte has argued that the film adopts a subtle montage of its own through its use of architectural frames, of doorways that open and close to divide different sequences episodically and spatially. He notes the use of sound, a certain 'swooshing' noise that accompanies the camera as it sweeps through these divides, calling attention to these moments of separation and connection (Harte 2005). For Harte, this framing is crucial: it is the distinguishing characteristic of the film's ambitions toward a presentation of the eternal. In Harte's analysis, Sokurov's camera continually seeks out the paintings, easing the film frame into and out of unity with the great images of art, a constant elision between the transcendent quality of an historical artwork, a singular instance of pictorial creation, and the ephemeral quality of the moving film image. By

extension, this dialogue between the eternal, preservative qualities of painting and the motion of film speaks of ‘the ongoing human struggle against mortality’ (Harte 2005: 44). Such a struggle is accentuated – as in Sokurov’s own rhetoric – with the essence of the museum as the vessel or ‘ark’. Such a struggle with mortality is nowhere more apparent than in the glimpse Custine makes of the frame room during World War II: where death and violence are in the ascendancy, the frames are empty like so many lost lives (Harte 2005: 56). In the end, the combination of painting and cinema, pictorial, architectural and cinematic frames, ‘indicates the fluctuation between mortality and eternity, as well as between the present and the past, [that] is ongoing within the museum and palace’ (Harte 2005: 58).

If such rhetoric seems to overburden the status of both painting and the cinematic image with an idealism it nevertheless points to the preoccupation with a rationalisation of the cinema as first and foremost a temporal articulation and mediation. Julian Graffy approaches the continuous shot from a similar conceptual position: ‘If history and culture are flux and irresolution, then perhaps we can best address them through a journey which alternates fluid motion with moments of stasis and periods of dizzying convulsion’ (Graffy 2003: 53). Sokurov has talked metaphorically of making his film ‘in a single breath’ (Christie 2003: 11). He does not go so far as to suggest if this is an inhalation, an exhalation or a held breath. Since the camera for the most part travels forwards we might infer an exhaled breath as if the camera were itself born along on this breath, a metaphor loaded with finitude, with exhaustion and the emptying of life, though such an assumption would seem to conflict with the film’s final utterance: ‘And we must drift forever, and we must live forever’.

Elsewhere, the director has referred to his preference for a ‘favourite grammatical form: the present continuous’ (in Christie 2003: 11). Leaving aside the symbolist and occasionally over-precious rhetoric associated with Sokurov’s film, it is here, in the film’s ‘present continuous’ (Pasolini’s ‘primordial state’ of cinema) that *Russian Ark* offers another inference: the cinema as look, an *ethos* of looking. The present continuous is the state of looking. And, with the film’s opening reference to sight, to vision, it is the relationship between sight and obscurity that remains at its heart. As the narrator resigns us to ‘drifting’ and ‘living’ forever, the camera has emerged from the Hermitage and plunged into the obscurity of the St. Petersburg fog. Once again, looking into obscurity is the film’s condition, its awareness of its historical present, its only

means to suspend itself, and its retention of the demand to look, where obscurity is the necessary 'blind spot' within every act of looking.

At this point, we can begin to locate what Jean-Luc Nancy calls an 'ethos' of the look: 'One must reaffirm again the ethos of the look – not by turning one's eyes toward a firmament spangled with values, but by facing straight ahead into obscurity' (in Gasché 1997: 151). In this first example, Nancy was writing of politics and history. Later, commenting on the films of Abbas Kiarostami, he writes, 'capturing images is clearly an *ethos*, a disposition, and a conduct in regard to the world' (Nancy 2001: 16). The question of an 'ethos' of looking is one that Nancy uses with respect to a mode of address for the cinema that withdraws from the currency of representation and meaning and realigns itself with a presentation of 'sense'. Nancy uses *ethos*, along with 'exposure', 'respect', 'regard' and 'justice' at various times throughout his writings on politics and aesthetics: such terms serving to emphasise the ethical but non-representational dimension.

As Laura McMahon has identified, terms such as 'vision', 'reality' and 'representation' 'denote encoded ways of looking at things which do not do justice to worldly existence' (McMahon 2010: 76). The real, onto which the cinema 'looks', in Nancy's configuration, does not equate with a literal visualisation or re-presentation but is argued as a question of 'taking care' which, as noted in Chapter Four, extends from the Heideggerian conception of the artwork as 'unconcealment'. Recalling the Heideggerian notion of care as both an anxiety and a respect (Inwood 2000: 57), Nancy's configuration of an 'ethos' of the look withdraws the cinematic image from an explicitly representational imperative that consigns each image to a set of determined values that is a mastery of the world. Rather, it attempts to locate the image as the limit situation of 'sense', or an exposure to worldly existence that is affective, expressive but suspended or in excess of full completion within a representational order of meaning. It is an 'ethos' which includes the tension of presentation and withdrawal that can occur within an image or an historical event.

It is in this respect that an 'ethos' of looking can equally apply to *The Asthenic Syndrome*, *Palms* or *Russian Ark*. It should not be equated with a *style* or a particular technique of framing, camera movement, or any consistent formula. The tension, within each of these films, between 'vision' and seeing and the withdrawal or the obscuring of that vision is aimed at exposing not simply a representational vision but an historical and ideative 'vision' also: the very vision of a Soviet history and State that is collapsing. Furthermore, it is in this latter respect that the aesthetic

suspension and obscuring of vision reflects the particular ‘post-historical’ hiatus from which these films emerged. Nancy suggests, writing of the end of Soviet Communism and the ‘universal’ expansion of Europe (the very same conundrum that Sokurov identifies in *Russian Ark*), the pressing concern is less a matter of looking at the world in terms of the ‘vision’ of what it should be, dominated by a totalising horizon, but, rather, a matter of taking a ‘finite look at the infinite’ (in Gasché 1997: 151). As Rodolphe Gasché summarises: ‘Once the universal is no longer recognizable as that which is most proper to us, the incumbent task is not to seek to reanimate it by calling upon values but rather “*to look, without looking away, at what thus happens to us*” (Gasché 1997: 151, my emphasis).

CHAPTER 8

Sin: Sátántangó; Songs from the Second Floor

In his hermeneutic development of the symbols of sin and redemption, Paul Ricoeur extends the phase of sin to a relationship between idolatry and the Wrath of God (Ricoeur 1967: 63). Ricoeur argues that ‘sin’ comes about when humanity has a conception of God but it has turned away from Him. He locates the Judeo-Christian dichotomy of suffering and indignation as a ‘new modality of dread’ expressed through the symbols of God’s wrath (Ricoeur 1967: 63). Suffering is no longer the effect of a resurgence of a cosmological or primordial chaos but is the wrath of God Himself, a consequence of humanity’s hubris and vanity (Ricoeur 1967: 75). In turning away from God, humanity has likened itself to God and this is the source of ‘false idols’ whose ‘nothingness’ is the correlative to this forgetting. Idolatry replaces the true recognition of God with a false representation in the image of humankind (Ricoeur 1967: 76). This brings about the Wrath of God, which Ricoeur notes, is no longer the ‘spectacle of unsubstantial things’ – here he cites ‘vapor, exhalation, mist, wind, dust’; the obscuring of vision – but the ‘spectacle of false sacredness’ (Ricoeur 1967: 75). The destruction and catastrophe that occurs as a result of the Wrath of God is also no longer that of ‘eternal punishments’ or the cosmological cycles of fate; it ‘remains within the limits of a penal interpretation of real history’ (Ricoeur 1967: 67).

This chapter is concerned with the evocation of such myths and symbols, bound to idolatry and false promises, and their interruption. Two films stand out in this regard: Béla Tarr’s *Sátántangó*, and Roy Andersson’s *Songs from the Second Floor*. Each of these films, marked by destruction, disintegration and decay at a social, systemic level, is also replete with images of idolatry in terms of both secular occultism and religious iconography. Likewise, each film is bound by a particular sense of community: for *Sátántangó* it is the structure of a collective farm that is about to be disbanded; in *Songs from the Second Floor*, it is the exchange dynamics of a modern mercantile city that start to fall apart. Questions of community cut to the heart of the system of myth and symbol as the formula for shared meaning. It is the interruption by destruction, decay and disintegration that opens, at the limit, the recognition of such symbolic structures of community. The argument of this chapter, then, is that *Sátántangó* and *Songs from the Second Floor*, in presenting worlds that are ostensibly falling apart, seek to give a ‘sense’ of those worlds and

their tenuous structures whilst withdrawing the salvific terms of overcoming or recovery at the base of traditional myth. They seek to ask the question that Jean-Luc Nancy asks in *The Creation of the World, or Globalization*,

The fact that the world is destroying itself is not a hypothesis: it is in a sense the fact from which any thinking of the world follows, to the point, however, that we do not exactly know what ‘to destroy’ means, nor which world is destroying itself (Nancy 2007: 35).

In Béla Tarr’s *Sátántangó*, a world has come to an end, or, at least, it is on the brink of ending. Through its seven hours of screen time the film charts this world, and its community of people, as it gradually disintegrates. The film is not about the end of *the* world, of the natural world or the physical, material – global – world omnipotently viewed in its catastrophic destruction. It is not a disaster movie as such.

Jean-Luc Nancy describes a world as a totality of meaning, ‘to which a certain meaningful content or a certain value system properly belongs in the order of knowledge or thought as well as in that of affectivity and participation’ (Nancy 2007: 41). In this respect, there is not one *world* but countless worlds, each a totality of meaning identified with the accord of its community:

Belonging to such a totality consists in sharing this content and this tonality in the sense of ‘being familiar with it,’ as one says; that is to say, of apprehending its codes and texts, precisely when their reference points, signs, codes, and texts are neither explicit nor exposed as such (Nancy 2007: 41).

The worlds that are disintegrating in *Sátántangó* are historical and conceptual as well as they are material and ideal. In its opening shot, a gradual, unbroken track of more than nine minutes, a herd of cows lumbers from a barn out into the rain-drenched yard of a collective farm. Events take place in Hungary, we presume, though the location is never mentioned. However, since all the characters speak Hungarian and the great plain and its sparse horizon surrounds the farm, it is acceptable to assume what occurs does so in Hungary.

The film’s director has categorically denied any allegorical meaning for his film – released in 1994 and set on an already obsolete collective farm. These terms of production make allegorical

readings of the collapse of communism tempting but the film offers no explicit points of reference. John Orr, reviewing the film, highlights the problem: 'For those who wish to read politics into fable, a typical western response to things eastern, Tarr offers little consolation. Who says this is a commentary on 1989? Might it not equally be a meditation on 1956?' (Orr 2001: 24). Allegory, bound to the logic of representation, overshoots its mark. Tarr's film may be all or none of these things – that is a part of its mystery. But at its core is the erosion and disintegration of the systems of trust, organisation and community that must be sustained in human relations, and it is the vision, especially in its future sense – of a faith in the abstracted promise of salvation, a metaphysics of desire – that the film formally and narratively exhausts and returns to the horizon of the material, the real.

What *can* be said of Tarr's film, and its world, is that there is a community of people and a collective farm located in a sparse expanse of windswept, rain-sodden Hungarian plain. This collective farm, whose operation, we must assume, has held together the small community of people, has ceased as an entity. Its members are awaiting the arrival of a substantial final payment. We learn of this since one man is plotting with his wife to steal the money. However, his unfaithful wife's lover overhears the scheming and secures himself a part in the theft. At the same time, word gets around that a mysterious, charismatic figure called Irimaïs, who had once promised to help the collective but had then disappeared, has been seen on the road, apparently returning. The news of his return assumes additional portent since the community had been led to believe that Irimaïs was dead. With their immediate futures blighted by uncertainty the members of the collective rapidly project their hopes of escape, of protection, security and affluence onto this figure and his past promises. Irimaïs, 'resurrected', appears as the means of securing a destiny for the group seemingly abandoned by the movement of the inexplicable forces and circumstances they believe to be beyond their control. Thereafter, the small community is left to wait and the film waits with them.

However, what the film reveals to the audience – the collective remain oblivious – is that Irimaïs is nothing but a petty criminal who has spent those absent years in gaol. Moreover, in a typically ambiguous sequence, he is seen to take orders from a security officer, with whom he has 'no choice but to collaborate', apparently with the instruction to inform on the collective's members. Freedom and order are evoked but everything, according to the policeman, is a necessity of 'law'. To what end or purpose, or on what basis the 'law' is interested in the

collective remains unspecified. The scene merely echoes the function of a police state or an oppressive socio-political order. Released, and drinking in a bar, Irimaïs unleashes a verbal tirade, threatening 'to blow them all up' – though whether 'they' refers to the immediate drinkers whom he regards with disdain, or the collective, the state police or, indeed, everyone, is again not specified. Nevertheless, on the road with his accomplice Irimaïs unleashes a rhetoric of vengeance towards the collective, accusing them of *ressentiment*: 'They were servants and that they will be all their lives'; 'slaves that lost their master'; 'they go after that shadow like a herd, for they can't live without splendour and illusion'.

In the meantime, the interrelations of the collective are sketched out further, each character seemingly standing for a certain type in a broader configuration of humanity – the woman who sleeps around, the men who sleep with her, the needy who require others to cling to for self-justification, the loners, the selfish, the desperate. As types they spread across the most helpless, the most miserable, the perverse and contradictory aspects of human relations and human nature. There is the community doctor, an alcoholic who watches all the others from his window, scribbling down their daily activities and infidelities in a notebook. Countless other notebooks testify to his lengthy surveillance although he appears to do nothing with this information. When he runs out of plum brandy the film embarks on a lengthy sequence following his shambolic struggle across the yard in pelting rain to acquire more. There is also a neglected child: she is seen to torment a farm cat, which she eventually poisons. Later she poisons herself, unnoticed by the community who spend a day and night dancing and drinking and descending remorselessly into stupor.

Irimaïs's arrival coincides with the discovery of the child. He makes a speech over her corpse condemning the collective for their implicit responsibility for her death through their natural propensity to sin. He threatens them with the logic of a police investigation before ultimately setting out his scheme and his need of their money in return for their collective redemption. He plans to acquire an estate and establish an 'island' where 'no one is powerless, where everyone will live in peace and will feel safe'. The collective place themselves, their faith and their money, in Irimaïs's hands.

The following morning the group pack, destroying what items of furniture cannot be transported, and set off, preparing to liaise at the manor designated by Irimaïs. In the meantime,

he and his henchman have gone to a town to meet a man from whom he wishes to buy explosives, the purposes of which remain again unelaborated. He also sends his report to the police officer.

Assembled at the new location, a derelict country house, Irimaïs reports that the plan must be postponed. The reasons given are ambiguous, implying either political or possibly criminal undercurrents – ‘Their primary objection is the fact that the manor [...] could hardly be brought under control’ he states – without identifying who ‘they’ are. As such, the collective – designated as ‘special people’ by Irimaïs – are to be dispersed throughout the town where they are instructed to wait in isolation until further notice. At the police station, two junior officers type up Irimaïs’s report with little interest or urgency, occasionally moderating the wildly abusive invective that Irimaïs has used to describe the group.

Finally, the film returns to the farm, where the doctor – having spent some days in hospital as a result of collapsing during his trek for alcohol – continues to make observations from his window, seemingly oblivious that all the other people have moved on. Tormented by the sound of ghostly bells coming from a derelict church that lost its bell tower ‘in the war’, the doctor investigates. He finds an improvised bell being tolled by a madman. Returning home the doctor boards up his windows. In his notebook, he begins to scribble a commentary that was heard at the opening of the film, delivered by an omniscient narrator, the content of which is almost, but not quite, the same.

Such is the minimal ‘plot’ of *Sátántangó*, a simple inventory of greed, infidelity, swindling and an irrational faith in a false messiah. The coming of Irimaïs, the false prophet-cum-con man, is not a plot to be revealed. Organised as a series of twelve chapters, the film informs its audience of Irimaïs’s crookedness in chapter two. Appearance and deception are made explicit. Instead, the effects of deception and, more particularly, the faith in redemptive illusion, is the film’s target. As András Bálint Kovács suggests, ‘this metaphysical territory [the traditional locus for other-worldly salvation] is none other than a shelter from utter despair, and belief in it is the final proof of human defencelessness’ (Kovacs 2004: 241). As with *The Asthenic Syndrome*, *Sátántangó* is determined to resist all narrative formula for redemption, either collective or individual. What it shows is the misery and helplessness to which human existence can succumb, the evident failure of salvific promises and the propensity of human beings to abuse, cheat and undermine each other. Yet its central formal technique is not an articulation that consigns such misery to the definition of the world. Instead, its perpetual suspense and withdrawal seeks, by looking directly at the fissures,

cracks, failings and inconsistencies of narrative and idealised solutions, to expose – in something like a cinematic deconstructive manoeuvre – the limits of such solutions.

Structurally it replays some but not all of its parts from varying perspectives: an infidelity revealed in chapter one is replayed as those aspects visible from the doctor's window in chapter three; the drunken wake is glimpsed by both the doctor on his trek and the doomed child searching for her family. Such replaying and repetition does not provide revelation. It does not piece together narrative information as if points of view were parts of a jigsaw or some cinematic panopticon that might forensically lead towards a truth there to be detected. They are merely occurrences or coincidences of time and place bound by intersecting lives in a finite space. There are certainly allusive thematic recurrences dispersed throughout: the notion of a herd instinct makes itself felt not simply in the collective's willingness to follow Irimaïs or in the film's opening shot of cows emerging from a barn and moving across the farmyard. It recurs in another scene in a seemingly deserted town: Irimaïs witnesses a herd of horses galloping across the central square ('The horses got away from the slaughterhouse again'). In between these minimal events and encounters there is much waiting, walking and watching. In fact, it is waiting, walking and watching that become the film's key methodological motifs.

Waiting could be said to be the film's dominant mode of address, a condition replete with suspense: waiting for the money and waiting for the opportunity to get away with the money, these are then interrupted by the wait for Irimaïs to return. The group move through phases of expectation – rumour, speculation, anticipation, and agitation. When the prophet arrives there is the waiting for instructions, waiting to leave for the promised estate and ultimately, the final dispersal throughout the town to wait on the promise of further instructions.

Walking is the second mode of suspense, and a suspension. Irimaïs's movements are metered by lengthy sequences in which he and his accomplices stride through featureless landscapes, along pot-holed country roads and down litter-strewn streets in towns emptied of all other human life. The doctor too, embarks on two lengthy walks – to fetch alcohol and to investigate the derelict church. On each occasion of walking the camera proceeds to track the walk, either following, reversing or parallel, as a measure of the present. Whilst these walks indeed connect the minimal plot and spatial relations of the film's world, their sheer excess inverts their narrative necessity to present the order of time as a perseverance of being. Each walk does not convey a small fragment of a punctuating ellipsis between plot points that lead to revelation so

much as an extended fragment of the presence of the wait. These walks, located against panoramic, featureless horizons or funnelled into distant architectural perspectives in the town, serve to emphasise the physicality of the walk and of distance. Each walk takes place as an act of perseverance in the face of the elements: pouring rain and debris-swirling winds. Tarr carries this deliberate stressing of the present-continuous duration of the walk over into *Werckmeister Harmonies*, reiterating its rhythmic marking of time, its extended imminence without arrival. There, as in *Sátántangó*, the relationship between the walk and the camera that tracks it demands a concentration of looking allied to a severe patience, a state of being in imminence.

Imminence is present in the watching that Tarr transfers from his earlier film, *Damnation* (1988). Also fuelled by duplicity and double-crossing in a small Hungarian town, *Damnation* constructs a milieu in which human beings spy on one another and when not spying on one another, they watch time passing: expressed most explicitly in the film's daring opening shot, a lengthy, painfully slow track back from the image of a coal-ferrying cable car, back through a window as an apparent point-of-view shot, only to pass over the watcher's shoulder to reveal a man gazing into space that, at the same time, subverts the tensions of cinematic subjectivity with a rejection of the empathetic gaze by stressing the deliberate, passive-objective camera. *Sátántangó* continues this method, while as an activity within the film, the doctor gazes ceaselessly from his window; the child gazes out across the plain to the blank line of the horizon; Irimaïs's lackey, the girl's teenage brother, gazes along a road, waiting for his master. When Irimaïs arrives, the boy briefs him on all the relations and infidelities of the group: it is clear that he too must engage in his fair share of spying. Throughout the film figures walk towards vanishing points or along horizon lines; they emerge from or head towards the limits of perspective and of narrative space, to and from – and without ever reaching – its vanishing points.

In the end, this waiting, walking and watching amounts to the most exhaustive terms for the documentation of the disintegration of the historical and conceptual world of the collective farm and its community of workers, and the material and ideal (or visionary) world of their salvation, promised by Irimaïs – a world of hope and trust. Both of these worlds are thereafter seen to be fragile, formulated on the flimsiest of grounds and ultimately, under the stress and friction of human abuses, disintegrate and decay. In this respect, *Sátántangó* is a film of process. Since much is inferred but nothing ultimately resolved, the film gives evidence of the gradual disintegration of the plans and projections offered at the beginning. Yet, with the reasons for so

many of these events shaded in mystery, even the likelihood that the ‘special people’ will ever get back together is not an impossibility despite the odds having been stacked resolutely against it.

The limit situation of worlds that the film configures and proceeds to disintegrate calls attention to what Nancy has called, in relation to both the presentation of worlds and the disposition of the cinema (as a type of artwork), an *ethos*, or sometimes a *habitus*. That is, each world is a unifying, totalising idea or image of a world, a vision or concept determined by a shared correspondence between those for whom it is recognised and experienced. In this way, Nancy is able to point to an *ethos* or *habitus* for the developed terms of a cinema history marked by representation: ‘you already have a hundred years of cinema in your eyes, in your *habitus* or your *ethos*. Film sits planted in your culture – I mean in your ways of living [...]. You have already composed and then broken down a wealth of film genres and cinematic myths’ (Nancy 2001: 14).

In *Sátántangó* the world of the collective farm, and the world of Irimaïs’s promise – as *habitus* (a configuration of shared community) and *ethos* (a configuration of shared interpretation and understanding) is expressed by that which exceeds these terms: the decay, the disintegration, the suspension of the ‘world’. This ungrounded excess presents instead, a world of ‘sense’, the raw material for understanding; that which has escaped the logic of myth or has been transposed into idolatry and false hopes that are seen to be failing. It is the failure that is addressed directly:

If the world, essentially, is not the representation of a universe (*cosmos*) nor that of a here below (a humiliated world, if not condemned by Christianity), but the excess – beyond any representation of an *ethos* or of a *habitus* – of a stance by which the world stands by itself, configures itself, and exposes itself in itself, relates to itself without referring to any given principle or to any determined end, then one must address the principle of such an absence of principle directly (Nancy 2007: 47).

Sátántangó seeks to challenge the *ethos* of one community, or *habitus*, through a change of address as an *ethos* of the cinema, a looking directed at the minutiae of decay and disintegration – communal, physical, conceptual – and in doing so, makes evident the decay of principles and the absence of principle that remains. The film constructs the shared totality of the collective farm and the human types who inhabit it and who have consigned the imagined worlds of their futures to the mythic promise of a false messiah. The decay and disintegration of this community is then

observed in terms close to those of a cinema in which ‘capturing images is an ethos, a disposition, and a conduct in regard to the world’ (Nancy 2001: 16).

This technique is centred on the passive-objective movement of the camera through the spatial relations of the film’s world. It gives equal measure to the physical and material world – rain, mud, cows, pigs, bricks, walls, landscape, horizons and human forms – and maintains a consistent attention to the existent facts of a material, recognisably real world that at the same time refuses to conform to the ideal or systematic orders of the worlds the characters may wish to impose on it. The camera continues to move amongst and to continue to look at a world that for everything it gives, exposes, or opens up, it persistently withdraws or suspends. The film, and by extension the film-maker, does not seek to impose themselves on a world they have created or recognised as if from an outside, a transcendent position of knowledge, but to position themselves within a milieu that constantly reveals and conceals. The film seeks not to express or represent particular worlds or to consign their failure to an alternative order of meaning. Rather, the presentation through visible excess and suspension of concepts as testament to the disintegration of an idealist metaphysics leaves an exposure, or remainder, that is the ‘syncopation’ of revelation and withdrawal that forms the real world of the artwork in Nancy’s formula. Laura McMahon summarises this relation between revelation and withdrawal that Nancy’s perspective on the cinema makes in relation to a real that does not represent a world but makes the world the starting point – the limit situation – for renegotiating meaning.

Exceeding the closure of representation via an opening onto the real, cinema here gives the world back to itself [...] This is a thinking of film which privileges materiality, sense and contact, whilst interrupting an investment in a metaphysics of immanence, immediacy and presence. It is a thinking of film which moves beyond subjectivity, propriety and interiority, emphasising an ethics of the look which elides codes of representation in order to do justice to the world. Moving between contact and spacing, between revelation and concealment, and between life and death, Nancy’s thinking of the real suggests ways in which the transimmanence of the world manifests itself on film (McMahon 2010: 90).

To elaborate this concept of the real further, and to distinguish it from a sense of the mimetic or indexical relation to a photographic real, or of a dependence on a ‘real world’ *mise-en-scène*, its

principles can be extended to another film of worlds disintegrating, Roy Andersson's *Songs from the Second Floor*.

Andersson's film is shot almost entirely in a studio using tromp l'oeil scenic effects, a heavily applied make-up style and a de-saturated colour palette to create its world through a series of painterly tableaux reminiscent of early twentieth century painter-caricaturists such as George Grosz, Otto Dix and Max Beckmann; again a non-realistic rendering of human types rather than individual, dramatic subjects. The camera remains static for each tableau which contains its entire scene within the duration of each fixed shot. The film comprises around forty of these tableaux, each configuring a self-contained event or incident, from the minute (a finger trapped in a door) to the immense (the gathering of the authorities of the state to sacrifice a child). Around twenty separate characters appear in more than one tableau though not to produce 'character arcs' in the narrative sense so much as further instances of particular situations. Commenting on the film Andersson has called his approach a 'trivialism': 'life portrayed as a series of trivial components' (Andersson 2004).

Each tableau contributes to an overall picture of a modern mercantile city undergoing catastrophic breakdown. Inexplicable occurrences of rupture, or of simple processes failing, steadily increase until they undermine every aspect of the city's means to function. These ruptures affect all elements of society, both the individual and the institutions of the state. Systems of exchange and mutual dependence are disintegrating. Long-serving employees are being laid off. Businesses are failing; a desperate furniture store proprietor burns down his shop in an attempt to claim the insurance. A magic trick goes wrong. The roads are grinding to a halt; gridlock stifles the functions of the city. Porsches no longer start. An immigrant is attacked in the street. Stockbrokers take to the streets in self-flagellating processions. The bosses of the Treasury desperately gaze into crystal balls searching for guidance. The state church is powerless to offer answers. The furniture store owner is haunted by the ghost of the friend from whom he borrowed money and who he failed to repay; a failure that led to suicide. The nation is haunted by the spectre of its Nazi collaboration during the war – a thinly veiled reference to the film's Swedish origin in an otherwise unidentified modern mercantile city. In the end the combined forces of the state – government, business, academia, church and military – come together in a bid to stem the breakdown. In the film's most macabre and blackly comic scene a young girl is sacrificed in a set-piece tableau of 2500 figures. The film eventually ends with Kalle, the furniture shop owner and

the film's most recurrent character, standing in a wasteland, only a flat horizon, the distant city and a foreground refuse dump around him. A despondent salesman who tried to offload plastic crucifixes on Kalle at an earlier trade fair arrives, flinging the many unsold Jesuses onto the dump. Left alone again, Kalle gazes toward the horizon. From the wasteland – and visually reminiscent of Gance's *J'accuse* – the dead begin to rise. Steadily they advance towards Kalle, oblivious or unconcerned by his presence. There the film ends.

Visually, each tableau is a deliberate obliteration of the identity of place. *Sátántangó* surrounded its protagonists in the helplessness of distance, the vast empty panorama of the Hungarian plain that cuts them off from contact, that which can only exist beyond the geographic horizon and so, therefore, from beyond a vision of the world to that of a visionary world. *Songs from the Second Floor* encloses its protagonists in the kind of 'non-places' of which Marc Augé has written: modern, uniform, universal mercantile spaces devoid of unique, particular or historically specific elements (Augé 1995). Each tableau is rendered as an intersection of walls, corridors, grid-locked street corners, the interiors of offices, apartments or hotel rooms with no discernible view from the window. Architectural space is formed from intersecting planes, of the surface of obstacles, each remaining anonymous – recognisably universal but in no way particular. The city could be imagined as being located anywhere or everywhere in the modern world. It is here that Nancy's real is not dependent on a 'realistic' image. The artwork is real as a surface in contact with the perceptual world in the same manner as a painting. It is in this shift of emphasis away from a 'real' as an indexical link to a profilmic reality and 'illusion' as a representational configuration of aesthetics that underpins Nancy's conception of the real and as such, can bring together two stylistically opposite films such as *Sátántangó* and *Songs from the Second Floor*. Whilst one determinedly and excessively foregrounds the material qualities of the 'real' world and the other expresses itself through a deliberate formal artifice, both films trace the pure form of the presentation of sense that is withdrawn or separated – distinct – as a form or image. The image, then, in Nancy's wider scheme encompasses all art forms, not only the visual but equally the tactile, cinematic, sonorous, choreographic and so on. Nancy uses the term 'distinct' in the opening essay of *The Ground of the Image*. In Ian James' summary, the image 'touches us; in its sensible form or line (*trait*) it has an affective force or intensity which makes sense but does not articulate any determinate meaning' (James 2006: 228). In Nancy's own words:

Each image is a singular variation on the totality of distinct sense – of sense which does not enchain the order of significations. Each image is a finite cutting out, by the mark of distinction. The superabundance of images in the multiplicity and in the history of the arts corresponds to this inexhaustible distinction. But each time, and at the same time, it is the *jouissance* of meaning, the jolt and the taste of its tension: a little sense in a pure state, infinitely opened or infinitely lost (however one wishes to say it) (Nancy 2005: 12).

Rosalind Galt has observed that, ‘Nancy refuses any Platonic suspicion of image-making in favor of a Heideggerian concern for how the image stages existence, being in the world’ (Galt 2008). Whether configured as the perpetual, gradual, continuously moving sequence shots that constitute *Sátántangó*, or as the precise, painterly, static tableaux of *Songs from the Second Floor*, the overriding factor is neither that of a particular characteristic of the image (mimesis or artifice, realism or spectacle) nor a matter of the order or articulation of signification as a logic of meaning. Instead, both films assert, through the disintegration of the particular worlds they create, an excess of recognition that is, at the same time, cut adrift from the formula of interpretation. Each film, as an artwork in Nancy’s broadest sense, is distinct, an exposure and withdrawal of those aspects in and of the image that separate themselves from the worlds of meaning and of things. Each film highlights recognisably human types without recourse to psychological or subjective paradigms or the logic of causes and effects. They describe always already recognisable conditions of human experience, of human contradictions, assembled within the fabric of a broader accumulation of limit situations – the faith placed in the false messiah or the exchange-value and sacrifice of a modern mercantile system.

We can recall, from the same essay ‘The Image-The Distinct’, Nancy’s use of the word *methexis*: ‘a participation or a contagion through which the image seizes us’ (Nancy 2005: 9). This is the force and impetus of the cinematic suspense within the films’ accumulation of images and sequences. Likewise, in both films it is the simple, ‘trivial’, instantly recognisable – human duplicity or catching a finger in a door – that is at the same time exposed without judgement, without an order of signification, only its incommensurability and its inscrutability. It appears, and separates, and conceals through the persistent accumulation of the films’ looking. Disintegration and the violence of forces conflicting against each other cut to the heart of this *methexis*. Images of violence and destruction, suffering and misery both fascinate and repel. In a second essay from *The*

Ground of the Image, Nancy observes ‘it must also be admitted that not only violence but the extreme violence of *cruelty* hovers at the edge of the image, of all images’ (Nancy 2005: 24). This is not a measure of the represented violence of an image, the measure of its bloodshed, so-to-speak, but rather the violence of the rupture that separates the image from world and at the same time uncouples that world from signification by its separation. The image is not a ‘calm surface of representation’ (Nancy 2005: 22) but an exposed fragment of the world, of sense, at the limits of signification.

The question of disintegration and the violence of contradiction presented within both of these films is formulated on the precision given to looking at the instances of contradiction, violence and rupture. Nancy continues: ‘The ambiguity of the image and of violence – of the violence at work in the image and of the image opening itself in violence – is the ambiguity of the *monstration* of the ground’ (Nancy 2005: 25); the ground, or ‘distinct’, is shown as the separation, the ‘opening onto groundlessness’ in opposition to the image that is ‘delivered out of an enclosed ground’ (Nancy 2005: 26).

In each film, beneath all of the occurrences of confrontation, duplicity, contradiction, or individual acts of cruelty is a greater violence and systemic disintegration. It is not given over to a specific set of criteria whether as the necessity of ‘law’, problem solving, manipulation for a purpose, or individual psychology. It remains irreducible to causes or effects. As such, both films implicitly refer to the central myth of violence at the heart of the mystery of religion through their messianic figures of redemption and the sacrifice. What disintegrates in each case is the ability of these myths to effect a salvation, restitution or reconciliation. What remains in each case – the content of the film’s looking – is the suspense of the message of passive suffering. If violence is a force that is measured by the image of its effects, *Sátántangó* and *Songs from the Second Floor* seek to suspend those effects in their threat and imminence – pointing to such threat and imminence as the structure of being. If divine violence is the recognition of the force of sacrifice in the effect of redemption, or the recognition of the violence of the force of law is found in the effect of punishment, such corresponding images are absent, or withdrawn, in both films. Only the decay of their myths is exposed in their accumulative structures; a looking without – in Nancy’s terms – a vision as the Idea or concept to be represented.

This violence of disintegration is structurally returned to the question of looking into obscurity that made itself apparent in *The Asthenic Syndrome*, *Palms* and *Russian Ark*. In *Sátántangó* the

obscurity of the vision of the false messiah leaves only, foregrounded, the excess of a movement of imminence that never completes itself. In the end, the film itself must arrest its own perpetual movement by the literal obscuring of its own frame from within the diegesis of the film. The doctor, at the end, boards up his own window from where he has continually watched and waited on the collective's actions. The window, the frame, the access to the world and the horizon is sealed over. In *Songs from the Second Floor*, in something of a reverse, the film opens up a horizon at last. After the intersection and slicing of perspectives in the city, the city is now viewed as a tiny blot on an otherwise featureless horizon. However, that is the moment when the vision of a future is obscured by the return of the past. The dead rise up in number. Some we have seen and can identify from the film's various tableaux, led by the sacrificed girl. Many more are unidentified but speak of countless unrecorded dead. They walk somnambulant towards Kalle and the camera, threatening to swamp and obscure the image and block the frame like a wave.

What *Sátántangó* and *Songs from the Second Floor* suggest is not the destruction of the world as such, but an opening onto a 'sense' of the construction of particular worlds, that may in a variety of ways resemble our own familiar world. The limit situation of this construction, the formula of myths and symbols and the overarching alignment of total destruction and suffering as the consequence of belief in false systems of redemption, does not represent the means to recover traditional values or assert new modes of overcoming. The interruption of these symbols and the orientation of the film's presentation – their detailed attention to the minutiae of disruption and disintegration of values – is an opening onto a 'sense' of world exposed as the raw data of experience. What is carried over, in the waiting, the deferral and suspension of 'ends' and, it should be argued, the retention of horizons as limits that need to be looked towards, is the unfulfilled demand for redemption. Where 'sin' as idolatry is exposed, this 'sense' does not appeal to the instigation of new positivities but resides in the recognition of the negatives of experience.

CHAPTER 9

Sin: *Werckmeister Harmonies*

The last chapter referred to Paul Ricoeur's notion of 'sin' as humanity's turning away from the divine towards itself. This leads to an idolatry and vanity that incurs the Wrath of God. This myth was interrupted in *Sátántangó* and *Songs from the Second Floor* through the disruption, disintegration and decay of the *habitus* of communal structures and the orders of signification. In turn, these disruptions result in an exposure of 'sense' as the excess of material and conceptual imagery that could only be continually looked at via an orientation of waiting and deferral. This looking was accentuated by the films' own endings which emphasise the look over and above the conceptual or narrative ending by means of the obscuring and reflecting of vision rather than the assertion of a fixed, new or redeemed state.

This chapter develops these notions in relation to another of Béla Tarr's films, his subsequent one, *Werckmeister Harmonies*, which, it will be argued, addresses another of Ricoeur's myths relating to 'sin' – that of the division of 'body' and 'soul', or what Ricoeur calls, 'the myth of the exiled soul and salvation through knowledge' (Ricoeur 1967: 279). Ricoeur states that this myth forms the 'one which all *anthropological dualism* endeavors to transpose and rationalize' (Ricoeur 1967: 279). This myth 'divides man into "soul" and "body"; it is on the basis of this myth that man understands himself as the *same* as his "soul" and "*other*" than his "body."' (Ricoeur 1967: 279).

However, it is precisely this 'anthropological dualism' that has been challenged in several 'deconstructive' approaches in philosophy, summarised by Ian James, as 'Nietzsche's genealogy of Christian-Platonic thought, Heidegger's conception of metaphysics as the history of onto-theology, Derrida's "logocentrism," and so on' (James 2006: 134). This 'so on' points, in particular, to Jean-Luc Nancy's working through of Christian and Christological motifs that seek to challenge the concept of self-overcoming at the heart of the Western tradition. As James observes, Nancy seeks to reconfigure the 'dualistic separation of spirit and body and the privileging of one over the other in a hierarchical relation' to consider instead the pair 'body/spirit' as a 'fusion', a 'consubstantiality' (James 2006: 136). Nancy argues, against the

Christian and similarly Cartesian attempt to sanctify the ‘spirit’ over and above the ‘body’, that it is based on an indeterminate status. James notes: ‘If we were entirely fallen bodies there would be no spirit within us to sanctify, if we were entirely spiritual there would be no mortal fleshy desires to satisfy’ (James 2006: 140). For Nancy, then, ‘spirit’ can be replaced with the formula of ‘sense’ – a thinking of world-hood and being-in-common that is both embodied and separate, both present and withdrawn (James 2006: 140).

At the same time, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has posed a similarly post-Heideggerian question of the body/soul split, this time with a focus on the political separation of the instinctual, animal, element of humankind and its spiritual, intellectual, human element as opposition.

In our culture, man has always been thought of as the articulation and conjunction of a body and a soul, of a living thing and a logos, of a natural (or animal) element and a supernatural or social or divine element. We must learn instead to think of man as what results from the incongruity of these two elements, and investigate not the metaphysical mystery of conjunction, but rather the practical and political mystery of separation (Agamben 2004: 16).

It is this question of the separation and the presentation and withdrawal of the human/animal, spirit/body split that, this chapter argues, is a dominant aspect of *Werckmeister Harmonies*. Its final image presents the human and animal face to face: the camera, following the musician Eszter, slowly tracks along the surface of the stuffed whale that has formed the locus of catastrophe in the film, until it draws parallel with the creature’s, dead, unblinking eye. Eszter faces the impenetrable creature then turns away. After a final look, he exits the frame and the huge, dead creature is consumed in swirling fog. It is within this final juxtaposition that *Werckmeister Harmonies* seeks to disrupt the myth of the triumph of spirit over body and to expose the ‘sense’ of one and the other as the site of human being-in-common.

Like *Sátántangó*, *Werckmeister Harmonies* is an adaptation from a novel by László Krasznahorkai (who collaborated on both scripts), and renders an even more mysterious configuration of events than the earlier film. Where *Sátántangó* maintained a relatively simple

‘plot’ of duplicity and exploitation at its heart, *Werckmeister Harmonies* develops themes that hint allusively at the cosmological and the humanistic.

The film’s content revolves around the arrival in a small Hungarian town of a circus featuring a huge stuffed whale as its central exhibit. This circus is presided over by a mysterious figure called ‘The Prince’, who is witnessed only as a shadow. He is overheard to incite anarchy by the film’s principle protagonist, Valushka. However, the town has already been rife with rumours among its population – of an eclipse and apocalyptic prognostications of imminent catastrophe. Whether the arrival of The Prince and the subsequent collapse into riot, violence and destruction is directly linked to the circus or whether the violence that occurs is a symptom of its own momentum remains the film’s central mystery. Further themes of cosmological, musical and political disturbance punctuate the film. Valushka, the town postman, assumes the figure of a witness, moving through the film’s progression of rumour, disturbance, riot and subsequent martial law – implicitly he is the film’s holy fool. However, how innocent a witness Valushka may ultimately be is another of the film’s secrets. In the opening scene, Valushka choreographs a group of late-night drunks in a bar into a pattern of celestial bodies as a means to demonstrate the eclipse. Thereafter, Valushka visits Eszter, a musician who has been working on a project to return the harmonic system to what he proclaims is its original truth, following its corruption by the system of ‘constant-tempered tuning’ – the traditional twelve-note system that replaces a discordant truth with an harmonic order. Valushka becomes the go-between when a malevolent opportunist, Eszter’s ex-wife Tünde, seeks to gain political control of the town with the aid of her lover, the chief of police, in the midst of the town’s paranoia. It is Valushka who witnesses the build-up of crowds in the town square and he is present when the crowd’s tension finally erupts into rioting, marching on a hospital and embarking on an orgy of destruction and violence. In its immediate aftermath, Valushka finds and reads a journal of the night’s violent events, though whether this is his own testimony is, again, inconclusive.

Once the rioting has been quelled by martial law – in which Tünde appears to be instrumental – Valushka is warned that the authorities are searching for him. As he tries to escape the town he is intercepted by a military helicopter. Eszter, seemingly coerced into obedience to the town’s new authorities, visits Valushka, now apparently mentally broken and in a hospital. Eszter states he has abandoned his musical studies and re-tuned the piano to traditional harmonics. Eszter walks alone through the debris-strewn town square, now emptied of people. The whale has

been abandoned amid the remains of the riot. Eszter looks it in the eye then walks across the square obscured in what is either fog, or the billowing smoke of the ravaged town.

Again, Tarr's technique privileges a meticulous use of measured, slow and lengthy sequence shots that move dispassionately and objectively before, around and between the movements and actions depicted. This is nowhere more evident than in the riot that takes place in the hospital. The camera glides within the midst of the mob as it surges through corridors and into rooms, overturning furniture and assaulting the helpless inmates. It turns this way and that, glimpsing violence and destruction but never lingering. It sets out to emphasise the duration and the hypnotic rhythm of the mob rather than dwell on individual perpetrators or victims. Neither does the continuous, uncut movement allow for any conventional articulation of action and reaction, empathy or motive. John Orr emphasises the effect of this technique through the mathematics involved: 'In an age when the average US movie contains 1,100 shots per 100 minutes, *Werckmeister* has an improbable 39 shots in 145 minutes' (Orr 2001: 22).

Such minimal edits and lengthy sequences construct a series of mysteries: not only are there the questions over the role of the circus and the shadowy Prince as the catalyst for the gathering of the crowds and the town's descent into riot, but there is also the possibility of the eclipse or Eszter's tampering with the harmonic system as further disturbances to the fabric of the town's order. Indeed, Eszter's actions may only coincidentally suggest the figure of an intelligentsia obsessing over abstractions as the town is taken over by the political machinations of a reactionary element. The source of the journal of the night of destruction remains a mystery, along with Valushka's part in the proceedings. When the riot suddenly loses its momentum, its energy seemingly spent at the sight of a helpless, naked old man, and the mob somnambulantlly disperses, the camera turns and pauses, revealing Valushka hiding in the shadows – a witness or orchestrator? Perhaps the biggest mystery that the film invites its viewers to contemplate is set out in the lengthy opening scene of the drunks in the bar. As Valushka directs them in the movements of the celestial spheres, he says, 'All I ask is that you step with me into the boundlessness where constancy, quietude and peace, infinite emptiness reign. And just imagine that in this infinite sonorous silence everywhere is an impenetrable darkness.' Moreover, in Valushka's later invitation to Eszter to visit the whale, he says, 'all a man can do is look upon it and see how great is the Lord's creative impulse and power, and how omnipotence is reflected in that animal. That's what has to be looked at, must be seen, Uncle Gyuri.'

The scene at the close of the film, when, after visiting Valushka in the hospital, Eszter finally visits the whale and pauses, facing its inscrutable eye, mirrors the earlier shot of Valushka: when he first encounters the whale, revealed inside its truck, he moves along its side until he is facing it, gazing into its eye. The camera takes up the same position in both shots, framing the human and the animal turned toward each other, facing each other – and accentuating the space in between; an in-between of darkness and of fog. The bottomlessness which Valushka invites the drunks – and perhaps humanity – to contemplate is this *in between*.

Stephen Mulhall has drawn attention to the *in between* of the human and animal that Heidegger highlights as the bottomless condition of Being: ‘for Heidegger, that which apparently distinguishes human and animal modes of being (our freedom, which presupposes a knowledge of good and evil, and makes individuality possible) is also what relates us to them’ (Mulhall 2005a: 83). Mulhall further states how this configuration, of the ‘enigmatically perverse animality of the human’ is a recasting by Heidegger of the Christian myth of the Fall (Mulhall 2005a: 84). Heidegger claims that the human being effectively suppresses its original animal nature and then turns that internal animality into an external figure of inner perversity, an essentially nonhuman element within the human that is always enigmatic and threatens our humanity through drives and desires that produce increasingly primitive responses to the world. At the same time, this animality informs our sense of achievement of our humanness through its equally enigmatic provision of interest in the world and in ourselves: a fallen state (Mulhall 2005a: 83).

As was stated above, Jean-Luc Nancy and Giorgio Agamben, both following and developing Heidegger, have gone furthest in locating this Christian myth of body and soul, sensible and intelligible, animal and human as the locus of Western metaphysics and the need, therefore, to think the terms of separation itself rather than remain within the narrative of its overcoming. Agamben calls this orientation the ‘anthropological machine of humanism’ (Agamben 2004: 29). He refers to the mysterious conjunction of, and ultimate dominance by, a supernatural social or divine element over and above a natural living body, claiming it needs to be rethought as a separation. In both cases, each theorist focuses on the suspension or the in-between of this conjunction in an attempt to prise open a space that configures, in Agamben’s terminology, a ‘bare life’ (Agamben 2004, 38) that may point to the exposure of a finite embodied sense as the limits for thinking existence.

If, then, on the surface, the martial law and the aftermath of destruction that configures the apparent ‘end’ of *Werckmeister Harmonies* suggests a destructive and reactionary inevitability, the film’s recurrent and final image of the mysterious gulf between the human and the implacable animal may invite a deeper concentration of the means to be human than any narrative restitution or reconciliation of the human over the animal, whose traditions are more conventionally privileged in the cinema.

Catastrophe is a central motif in the cinema’s lengthy formulation of the human spirit and its indomitable triumph over the lesser, bestial aspects of its nature. Moreover, it is underpinned by its implicitly Christological roots in so many scenarios of apocalypse, natural disaster and survival. A staple of the disaster movie is the survival of the human remnant, through the ingenuity of intellect and spirit in the face of catastrophe where others turn to violence and destruction. A vast genre of commercial films, of which *2012* (2009) is merely the latest (and overtly Biblical) example, testifying to this. The remnant is even more explicit in the sub-genre of the ‘post-apocalyptic’ film in which the Earth, ravaged by catastrophe or war, is populated by survivors reduced to primitive drives in the struggle to regain a foothold on life. George Miller’s *Mad Max* trilogy (1979-1985), with its violence, feral children and primitive chaos represents the archetype. Although, in this vein, Kevin Costner’s *The Postman* (1997), with its opportunist hero masquerading as the eponymous mail carrier and apparent agent of re-formed government that ultimately represents the agent of communication and therefore civilisation, provides a clear example of the longevity of the messianic myth of humanistic salvation in a violent, primal world.

An explicit example of the traditional human/animal split can be seen in the British science fiction film *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967), whose plot revolves around the discovery, buried under a bomb-damaged underground station, of an alien spacecraft as immense, silent and implacable as *Werckmeister’s* whale.

Quatermass and the Pit first appeared as a television series broadcast by the BBC in 1959. It was the third in a series of stories written by Nigel Kneale involving the eponymous rocket scientist, Professor Quatermass. It was remade as a feature film by the Hammer studios in 1967. Nigel Kneale has discussed the source of the descent into chaos and violence that overtakes the population of London, identifying the race riots that occurred in the city during the 1950s after the initial phase of Jamaican immigration. Kneale claimed in a television interview in 1996 that he ‘sought to explain man’s savagery and intolerance by way of images that had been throbbing away

in the human brain since it first developed. Racial unrest, violence, purges... I tried to speculate on where they came from' (in Pixley 2005). Kneale's solution was to retell the story of the animal/human, body/soul configuration.

The plot of *Quatermass and the Pit* transposes the question of a consubstantiality of body and soul to both an extraterrestrial and a genetic origin. That is, the fusion of the human containment of instinct and a nonhuman, alien, biological drive toward violence and self-destruction is played out as a story of overcoming linked to the extraterrestrial insemination of humanity.

During work on the London Underground a mysterious cylinder is unearthed. As it is not recognisable as any German ordinance left over from the Second World War, Professor Quatermass is brought in to investigate its possible extraterrestrial origins. The cylinder is located under the fictional Hobb's Lane, so named for its etymological links with the Devil. The unearthing of the cylinder begins to effect elements of the local populace and civil unrest steadily increases. Violence and rioting occur nationwide and certain members of the community, including Quatermass himself, find themselves overwhelmed by primal, violent drives. Quatermass links the old stories of Devilish occurrences at the site through history to the effects of the cylinder. Eventually, after the discovery of the remains of an alien creature inside the object, it is revealed to be a craft from a long extinct Martian race of insect-like creatures. Driven by an instinctive death-drive that annihilated their own planet, the aliens visited Earth millennia before. There they mixed their genes with those of various strains of ape. The evolutionary outcome of this event has led to the strains of modern human variously receptive to the instinctual drives of their buried alien genes. The schematic breakdown of this has manifested itself in three of the plot's principal characters: a military officer who ultimately succumbs entirely to the alien influence; a palaeontologist, assisting Quatermass, whose genes are entirely unaffected; and Quatermass himself, who is partially affected. Therefore, Quatermass discovers that it is his own heredity, and the nonhuman within the human, against which he must battle. With London reduced to chaos and anarchy, its skyline aflame, Quatermass appears helpless. Only a final act of selfless sacrifice from the still rational palaeontologist finally overcomes the force of evil. The palaeontologist dies but in so doing disintegrates with electricity the force that, due to the spectacular necessity of cinema, has taken on a visual form – the ghostly shimmering and horned face of a devil looming vast in the night sky over London. The film effectively reiterates a lengthy pictorial heritage of visualising the relationship between the animal and human, and the underlying

‘devilish’ mythology it administers, that has prevailed throughout the history of western representative art.

Andrew Benjamin, in an essay responding to Giorgio Agamben’s *The Open: Man and Animal*, identifies two such images: a painting by Piero della Francesca and an engraving by Dürer. In the first, from 1496, Saint Michael is portrayed having slain the ‘devil’, represented by a snake-like creature described with the inscription ‘dragon’ – the word, as Benjamin argues, having become flesh reinforces ‘the incorporated refusal of the animal’ (Benjamin 2008: 72). In Dürer’s engraving, *Knight, Death and the Devil* (1513), the devil has taken on a more familiar form, the cloven-footed and horned human-animal form as it tempts the virtuous knight. The distinction Benjamin makes with respect to the two images is that in the first, the saint has deemed it necessary to kill the animal; in the second, the knight only remains vigilant against the threat of the animal. The human has absorbed and at the same time excluded the animal.

In the *Quatermass* film version the temporal logic of the cinema, its traditional narrative drive, re-invokes the Christological logic of ends through the need to position the alien/animal/devil’s death in relation to the human and the human’s overcoming of the animal. *Quatermass and the Pit* accentuates this Christological structure even further with the additional formula of the ultimate sacrifice in return for total salvation. As Benjamin reads the Dürer image, animality is reflected as a part of being human and therefore emphasises the recognition and co-existence of the human and animal which requires vigilance on the part of the human. In this second configuration, the animal is not seen to be killed but is presented as dead to us by its ‘silence in the realm of *logos*’ (Benjamin 2008: 76). In this version the animal – taking on a more abstract quality – implies consubstantiality and a division for which the human must claim dominance through suppression. It is in this second version, of the animal as silent but present – or in terms reminiscent of Nancy, as the animal that is presented and withdrawn – that the figure of the whale in *Werckmeister Harmonies* begins to take on the figure of this silent presence.

Giorgio Agamben’s ‘anthropological machine’ of Western metaphysics refers to a logic that is historical. The suspension of this logic coincides with the present hiatus of the ‘post-historical’ conditions of the contemporary world. Agamben’s political inflection argues that it is the historical factors that produced the relations between the human and animal, or non-human, and that these are configured in two phases. In its earliest version, as symbolised in Dürer’s engraving, the animal is separated and contained within the human as a form of religious vigilance

and suppression. In its modern version (which is the basis of his larger philosophical project of the ‘*homo sacer*’, Agamben 1995) the animal within the human is externalised and isolated. This concept reiterates the other central theme of Agamben’s philosophy, that of the ‘state of exception’ developed from Walter Benjamin’s *Theses on the Philosophy of History*: ‘the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule’ (Benjamin 1999: 248). In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben developed this theme as a biopolitics – the identification of a ‘bare life’ that is separated and excluded through the creation of the conditions of exception, a space in which the law is suspended – and characterised most explicitly by the death camp. In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Agamben sets out to develop the state of exception as an ontological category, beyond the political in *Homo Sacer*, and located in the western metaphysics of ‘anthropogenesis’ (Agamben 2004: 79). He argues that metaphysics is itself, the ‘*meta* that completes and preserves the overcoming of the animal *physis* in the direction of human history’ and is not a single event but a constant recurrence of the decision between ‘human and animal, nature and history’ (Agamben 2004: 79).

Following from Heidegger, Agamben claims that Being, or world – the relation that underpins Heidegger’s formula for ‘openness’, the oppositional but never quite coincidental pairing of ‘concealment-unconcealment’, ‘earth-world’ (in Inwood 2000: 119) – are not ideal concepts separated from the animal environment. The open is revealed by the interruption of the terms by which ‘animality’ is suspended within the systems of order or signification (Agamben 2004: 79). In Agamben’s overall argument, the anthropological machine that defines the becoming historical of the human being leads to two conditions: the first, that which preoccupied Heidegger at the end of his career, claims that humankind no longer attempts to preserve its animality but aims to control it by means of technology (a formula that has been extended to organ farming and genetic engineering); in the second, Agamben’s predominant thesis, humankind neither hides nor masters its own animality but subjects it to a ‘pure abandonment’ through the process of exception (a principle operated especially in the political arena, *in extremis* in the death camps of the Second World War, but applicable to configurations of immigration and anti-terrorism in the present era) (Agamben 2004: 80). Agamben’s further proposition, with respect to the present era, is that: ‘[i]f the anthropological machine was the motor for man’s becoming historical, the end of philosophy and the completion of the epochal destinations of being mean that today the machine is idling’ (Agamben 2004: 80).

In his critique Andrew Benjamin acknowledges the proposition of the state of exception (otherwise referred to interchangeably as a 'space of exception' or a 'zone of indistinction' (Benjamin 2008: 78) and elsewhere by Agamben, a 'zone of absolute indeterminacy' (Agamben 2005: 57)) as the original and provocative aspect of Agamben's project. The moment in which the division between the human and the animal that has configured the structure of human being in western thought is suspended, it presents an empty space, a 'caesura', that reveals neither a uniquely animal life nor uniquely human life but the category of 'bare life' – 'a life that is separated and excluded from itself' (in Benjamin 2008: 78). For Benjamin, however, the caesura is less an empty space waiting to be filled by a new human 'beyond the hold of identity' (that which he criticises as Agamben's 'utopianism', Benjamin 2008: 79) than a porous border across which the human and its animality must constantly negotiate (Benjamin 2008: 78).

It is here that we might place Tarr's film, as an aesthetics of looking that seeks to expose the limit situation, or borders, of the human and animal that are consistently crossed in the incorporation of the human. Again, we can suggestively recall Nancy's configuration of the limit situation that exposes 'sense' – a sense of being human as the relation of the human and animal, which Nancy would regard as an *ethos*, a broader configuration of representation in the West than Agamben's narrower, specifically political focus.

Quatermass and the Pit seeks to project the conditions of its story beyond the *ethos* to the genetic and hereditary, to biological death-drives and the ultimate triumph of a purely human species of intelligence; a condition, moreover, that manages to conflate this humanism with an apocalyptic and Christological mythology. As such, it seeks to project the human, and human salvation, into the possibilities for a destiny that is a form of life – the perfectability of the human – rather than as a negotiation or a form of coexistence.

Werckmeister Harmonies, for its part, presents the void or limit situation that is the configuration of the political terms of coexistence. That the film's narrative ends in the apparent triumph of the most reactionary elements of the town's community, in martial law and the seizure of power by some over others, serves as both a warning and a suggestive commentary on the political norm that is at stake. Martial law represents the mastery of the violent, the primal, the animal as it erupts within the town, by a larger, more brutal force. Military vehicles and personnel loiter on street corners towards the end of the film; a helicopter captures the fleeing Valushka.

However, the violence that brought martial law to bear on the town is presented in its fundamental mystery within the film. One can only conjecture as to whether the violence of the mob can be said to be revolutionary or destructive. The incitement by The Prince, seemingly testified to by Valushka's reading of the notebook found in the ruins, contains no motive or self-justification, no figure of oppression or necessary resistance. The contents of the notebook are fragmentary and seemingly contradictory: 'There is construction in all ruins' he is reported to have said, in the wake of the violence. And yet he proclaims: 'A single emotion for destruction, implacable, deadly'. 'He says he likes it when things fall apart' but he doesn't say why. The Prince says, 'What they build and what they will build, what they do and what they will do, is delusion and lies'. But again, the report does not make it clear if the 'they' is a reference to the rioters or to those reactionary forces who held power before or who hold power after. One line of the testimony speaks of the animal at loose within the human: 'We didn't find the real object of our abhorrence and despair, so we rushed at everything we came across with wilder and wilder fury'.

This wilder fury, the riot that reaches its pitch in the destruction of the hospital, also finds its crucial turning point and its dissipation when confronted by the naked figure of a withered old man – an image of 'bare life' as such – of the human form in all its helplessness, fragility and vulnerability. In the midst of the violence that takes place within the corridors and rooms of the hospital, rioters suddenly cease, one by one standing still. The camera does not change its pace or steady movement, it simply glides between the frozen figures to finally turn into a bare concrete and tiled room to reveal the old man. The camera lingers before it begins to pull back. As it does so, it joins the throng of rioters, now quelled, and filing steadily, impassively out of the building. There is no cut, no change of pace by the camera, simply the continuation of the same dispassionate rhythm of observation.

Like the movement of the camera in the midst of Sokurov's crowd leaving the Hermitage, that turns from its midst into a side-opening, so too does Tarr's camera. But instead of exiting with the throng of people into an obscurity of fog, Tarr's camera turns into the shadows and to the face of the partially lit Valushka looking on: his emotions unreadable. Whether witness or participant, Valushka is now merely the surface of the human face looking back. Valushka's face displays no clear expression – whether horror, empathy, remorse, fear, or whatever – instead, it remains implacable for the brief moment that it appears from the shadows and the film cuts away.

This refusal of a representative image of response to events is characteristic of the continual being in suspense that Tarr's film maintains among all its characters. It is the principle technique that Tarr administers in both *Sátántangó* and *Werckmeister Harmonies*; a coalescing of content and method that consistently presents and withdraws the symbolic and conceptual, or mythic formulae, to leave only the material and the embodied. The shadowy gulf that separates the human from the animal, repeated in the image of both Valushka and Eszter face to face with the implacable whale, perhaps signals the void into which the film invites the viewer. It is not a great mythological or cosmological void of meaning and nothingness, of chaos and order, but that which interrupts and separates the human from the animal. It suspends the narrative drive of representation that insists on the final image of distinction and overcoming (Quatermass' and Christianity's devil). In its fundamental act of looking at the means of violence without objectives, causes or judgements, *Werckmeister Harmonies* is itself a testimony, as Nancy might suggest, to the act of looking at the real of violence returned to us before its symbolisation.

CHAPTER 10

Guilt: *Dog Days*, *You the Living*, *Import Export*

The final phase of Paul Ricoeur's developmental progression leads from defilement, through sin, to guilt. Guilt is the internalisation of fault, the recognition within oneself of fallibility and therefore resides in a mode of 'confession'. Recalling Karl Simm's summary of this progression, 'in defilement I accuse another, in sin I am accused, but in guilt I accuse myself' (Simms 2003: 23): it is here that a conscience takes over from the wrath of God or the primordial chaos of eternal events. Guilt emphasises the ethical more than the religious, not so much answerable to God but answerable towards other people (Simms 2003: 23). But Ricoeur argues that although the promotion of guilt may produce a circle of condemnation, this should not be the case. Condemnation only appears after an event and only to the 'justified' conscience; this is merely a pedagogy. 'To the conscience still kept under the guard of the law', writes Ricoeur, that is, a sense of guilt, 'its real meaning is unknown' (Ricoeur 1967: 150).

Here, then, we might recall Stephen Mulhall's identification of the incomprehensible figure of redemption in the work of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein; that is, the movement away from Ricoeur's relation to the divine or theological symbol and toward a 'spiritual' or 'intellectual' practice:

We stand incomprehensibly in need of redemption, and we are incomprehensibly able to achieve it, through a certain kind of intellectual practice that is also a spiritual practice [...] a practice of enduring and embodying the human being's constitutive resistance to its own grasp (Mulhall 2005a: 12).

In this chapter, the focus is on three films that circulate around themes of guilt and suffering. Austrian director Ulrich Seidl's first feature film, *Dog Days*, and Swedish director Roy Andersson's follow-up to *Songs from the Second Floor*, called *You the Living*, might well be described as enduring and embodying the human being's constitutive resistance to its own grasp. Both films are structured as a series of vignettes of multiple characters unconnected by the cause/effect or

action/reaction relations of traditional narrative. What connects these people, occupying spaces in the characterless, quotidian architectures of modern European cities (one, the suburbs of Vienna, the other, a continuation of the trompe l'oeil studio facsimiles of a post-war Sweden) is a matter of theme: that is, the people's persistent means of antagonism, contradiction, struggle and an apparent disowning of their own best interests. The final film, Seidl's *Import Export*, it will be argued, also presents guilt as a central theme. The key questions will be: how are the motifs and symbols of guilt integrated into the films and how do the films' techniques, their relations of 'looking' and framing, relate to guilt's concept of 'self-accusation' and 'confession'?

Once again, we will find Nancy's suggestive configuration of the 'interrupted myth', or the refusal, suspension or excess of 'sense' giving onto an experiential real unfulfilled by interpretative logic or judgement. What Nancy calls an 'axiomatics of a way of looking' (Nancy 2001: 14) as a 'regard' for the world of sense will be translated into a form of discomfort in the films, a gaze that neither judges through distancing nor determines meaning or judgement through cause and effect.

In *Dog Days*, a violently jealous young man beats up anyone who looks at his beauty-queen girlfriend. Finally, he turns his rage on her. An elderly widower, in a constant dispute with his unseen neighbours, tries to turn his housekeeper into his dead wife. Later, his dog is mysteriously poisoned. A husband and wife, estranged since the loss of their daughter in a traffic accident, continue to share the same house, deliberately antagonising one another. The woman visits sex clubs and makes love to a visiting masseur with her husband still in the house, trying to make his presence felt with the constant bouncing of a tennis ball. A home security salesman visits various households, his patter loaded with society's potential threats to person and property. A middle-aged woman is visited by her abusive boyfriend and his drunken friend. They humiliate her. Later, the friend returns offering to take revenge on the woman's behalf. He abuses her boyfriend at gunpoint and only stops when the woman breaks down and declares her love for her violent boyfriend. These vignettes are punctuated by scenes of a young woman, Anna, who hangs around the car parks of suburban shopping malls, persuading drivers to give her lifts. Once in their cars she continually asks intrusive personal questions or rifles through their belongings. The film's slender structural arc thus involves Anna and Hruby, the security salesman. After a client has his car scratched Hruby is bullied into maintaining a lookout. To solve his problem, Hruby identifies Anna as the culprit and takes her to an empty holiday chalet. There she is abused by several car

owners and raped by Hruby's bullying client. After several scorching hot days there is a violent thunderstorm. The film ends with Anna, alone in a street at night, running from driveway to driveway setting off the automatic security lights.

Roy Andersson's *You the Living* continues the visual style of his earlier *Songs from the Second Floor*: a reduced palette of frosty yellow-greys, cadaverous make-up effects and static, painterly tableaux constructed in studio sets. However, the principal difference between the two films is that whereas *Songs from the Second Floor* targeted the large and abstract organisations of the State, *You the Living* homes in on the minute details of particular human tribulations. Many of the tableaux occur only once: a single 'sight-gag', a moment of conflict, difficulty, awkwardness or failure. These can be as simple or seemingly banal as missing a lift or joining the wrong ticket queue, being stuck in the rain because a bus shelter is full, the problem of noisy neighbours or the difficulties of taking a dog for a walk in old age. On other occasions, there are displays of human selfishness: a woman complains continually that no-one likes her whilst drinking heavily and insulting the hospitality and care of her stoical boyfriend's ageing mother. A son pesters his hardworking father for money, a situation that is clearly a persistent aspect of their relationship. A psychiatrist describes the futility of trying to make people happy as a profession and ponders his own happiness as he goes home alone. In other instances, the tiniest inflections of impromptu justice are provocatively hinted at: a self-obsessed and boorish businessman shows off in a restaurant while his wallet is stolen from him. An arrogant businessman racially abuses an immigrant barber, only for the barber to exact his revenge through the means of a haircut. In recurrent sequences, emotional distress fuels further longings: a young lovelorn woman dreams of a marriage to a charismatic rock guitarist. A tuba player cannot stop worrying about money during sex with his wife. A school teacher cries in front of her pupils after an argument with her husband, who, filled with remorse, expresses the argument and his remorse to his customers in his carpet shop. A company director drops dead in a meeting; his wife makes a lengthy plea to the altar in church as the priest and fellow worshippers become increasingly annoyed and impatient at the length of her prayer. A builder narrates a dream of social and class embarrassment: an attempt to perform the 'tablecloth trick' at a large family gathering. His failure, with the destruction of the family china, leads to his being sentenced to the electric chair after a hellish trial before beer-swilling judges. Finally, the film is framed within a dream of destruction: at the beginning a man confesses he had a nightmare in which a squadron of bombers threaten the city; in the film's final

sequence, city inhabitants look skywards. A mass of bombers then approaches the city overhead. Like *Songs from the Second Floor*, *You the Living* also opens with an epigraph, quoting Goethe: 'Be pleased then, you the living, in your delightfully warmed bed, before Lethe's ice-cold wave will lick your escaping foot'. In a single image, commuters alight from a fog-shrouded tram whose destination reads, 'Lethe' – the mythic name for the river of Oblivion where the dead drank to forget their earthly lives.

Each film, through its series of brief incidents, catalogues the kind of moments, from the petty to the deeply malevolent, that ultimately present human existence and experience as contradictory, conflictual and problematic. Moreover, it is human beings who are demonstrably the locus of either their own sufferings or the sufferings of others, even when frustration is merely a factor of the lives we have constructed for ourselves – as in the case of Andersson's missed lifts and obstructive ticket queues.

Most evident in both films is their formal strategies of framing. *You the Living*, like *Songs from the Second Floor*, continues the method of individual, self-contained static tableaux. The camera moves only twice in the film, once as a slow track through a banquet, singling out a particular character from the throng, and a second time as a barely visible framing adjustment. *Dog Days* is equally steadfast in its use of meticulously framed and composed static images. However, it punctuates these with more fluid use of hand-held sequences that contrast an intense claustrophobia of framing, a close proximity to the film's subjects and events, against the rupturing stasis of the static compositions.

However, as has been stated already, these films do not stand out for their formal characteristics alone, and despite the uniqueness of their respective visions – particularly Andersson's recourse to his own stylised *mise-en-scène* – there is nothing about which to proclaim a new style or aesthetic. They do not attempt to locate a formal characteristic as metaphor for a predicative state, as often occurs in modernism, such as that of Antonioni, for example. Rather, it is again (as with *The Asthenic Syndrome* or *Russian Ark*, *Werckmeister Harmonies* or *Elephant*) a matter of each film's incomplete, fragmentary itemisation of the disparate elements of its content coupled with structures of serialisation and accumulation instead of exposition, reconciliation or redemption that makes these films stand out. Moreover, this coalescing of content and accumulative form suspends the central theme of contradiction: of contradiction as central to human existence and contradiction as central to the form of the cinema.

In the first place, contradiction, at the level of content, is at the core of both films' preoccupation with the conceptual apparatus of 'sin' and 'suffering'. *Dog Days* distils its events to those brief moments of heightened aggression, violence, abuse or antagonism, suspending any lengthy exposition of cause or effect. At the heart of this is the suffering inflicted upon women by men. A young woman, Claudia, is abused by her jealous boyfriend. In one scene, he rails against her, denouncing her as 'just like all the other bitches' whom he claims to have been unfaithful to him. Likewise, Lucky, the violent and desperate accomplice of Wickerl – abusive lover of the middle-aged woman – offers his own list of failures with women by way of his presumed apology for the violent, drunken excesses meted out to the woman the night before. He locates the cause of all his problems in his wife who will not allow him access to their son – and 'the sins of all women'. In perhaps the film's key scene of the contradictions that violence delivers, Lucky threatens Wickerl at gun-point in front of the woman in an attempt to make him apologise for his actions. However, when the woman declares her love for the abusive Wickerl, Lucky ceases, resigned to disbelief. Finally, Hruby, under threat to find the culprits damaging his client's cars, blames the vulnerable Anna, taking her to a holiday chalet and allowing the victims of vandalism to visit, an action that ends in Anna's rape by one car owner.

A profound loneliness affects all of the characters, those both giving and receiving violence, and those whose struggles are more understated. The husband and wife who have lost their daughter circle each other in silence within their own house. Finally, the woman takes to striking her husband as, at the same time, she pleads with him finally to talk. The two come together in a single shot, thereafter, sitting beside each other on their deceased daughter's garden swing-set: they are not yet able to speak, but the body language in proximity contains the slightest embodiment of hope. Walter, the pensioner, resorts to returning packages to the supermarket to complain, itself seeming testimony to a lonely man's only means to communication and recognition. His enlisting of his housekeeper to dress in his deceased wife's clothes on the date of their fiftieth anniversary recalls the pain of loss. Likewise, the willingness of the elderly housekeeper to participate, even to perform a striptease, and to spend the night with the old man – whether for money or not is never made clear – speaks of her loneliness too. The position of the camera, a static frame on a plane that places itself as one third of a triumvirate of performance and spectatorship is discomfiting. However, Seidl places discomfort – of his characters, subjects and audience – at the centre of his films. As a result critics often characterise his work as extreme or

provocative, even ‘squalid’ and ‘unbearable to watch’ (Wheatley 2008: 47). His reputation extends from a list of documentary films for which the ‘confessional’ is at its most raw: films such as *Animal Love* (1996), *Models* (1998) and *Jesus You Know* (2003) develop a direct to camera testimony on the part of the film’s subjects on themes of relationships with pets, glamour modelling and religious confession respectively. Seidl’s complicity in the confessions is accentuated by his technique of ‘re-staging’ events, that is re-instigating events and involving the subjects in the performance of acts to which they testify. Crucially, however, Seidl’s technique refrains from judging; the films are themselves integrated into and integral to the re-staging of confessional events. These are simply framed and exposed without recourse to commentary, narrative or interpretative logic. It is the same technique that Seidl then adopts with his fiction films (which also contain non-professional actors and real-world environments).

Seidl’s films mix their static frames with a claustrophobic hand-held, documentary technique, the camera remaining in tight proximity to the subjects. The static frames are respectful, pictorially framed but placing the subject within the frame of their environment without passing self-reflexive judgement. The hand-held sequences foreground the camera’s presence within the space of the subject’s actions but never as a point-of-view, reaction shot or anything pertaining to an emotive force.

In this respect, Seidl always makes the camera, and himself, the film-maker, complicit in the discomfort and anxiety of the events, it necessarily ‘accuses’ itself within the formula of guilt. This is distinct from a didactic or pedagogic relation to guilt, as evidenced in the work of a film-maker such as Michael Haneke, whose implication of the audience in a film such as *Funny Games* (1997) is genuinely provocative in a ‘finger-wagging’ fashion. Seidl simply places himself, via his camera, within the space of discomfort the film constructs.

You the Living shifts the emphasis marginally from loneliness to the difficulties of attaining happiness or a meagre contentment. Each of the multiple protagonists is struggling with the daily grind of modern living. For some, such as the lovelorn Anna, or the psychiatrist who speaks, perhaps, for all in the film, happiness is an explicit goal but unattainable. For others, it is masked in the simple failures that make the most ordinary or daily activities – joining a ticket queue or dealing with family and relatives – that little bit more difficult than it might be. The legacy of the fallen comes to the film in secular form, from the recurrent scene of a bar in which it is forever closing time, and the barman who calls last orders: ‘This is what you get for your sins, you

homeless bastards! Tomorrow is another day'. Not an image of death for the sinners; not heaven or hell but a Sisyphus-like struggle.

Crucial to both films is the *mise-en-scène*: the 'anywhere and everywhere' of the modern or globalised mercantile environment. For *You the Living*, as in *Songs from the Second Floor*, the artifice of its studio sets is simply a paired down, or distilled version of a post-war Swedish modernism: an architecture loaded with pathos since it represents the vision of that nation's social-democratic State. Yet, in Andersson's painterly rendition, it is a now jaundiced vision: a picture gone sour at the very surface of its palette. There is deliberately nothing spectacular, inspiring or decadent about such architecture. It is a simplified form of anonymity and ordinariness – forgettable space rendered as the common space of everyday existence.

Andersson's choice of static framing and tableau compositions, continued from his earlier films, and directed to acts of guilt, suffering and contradiction, deliberately isolates the events or acts, removing the cause and effect implications of narrative space. There is a narrative space in the sense that all *mise-en-scène* is consistent, similar, related to a unifying, conditional 'world'. But each frame is an attention to detail, more painterly and pictorial than narrative; there is nothing of consequence outside the frame. The frame isolates, iconically, each act. And like Seidl, Andersson does not judge. The key theme of guilt that runs through each of his films, from *World of Glory*, through *Songs from the Second Floor*, to *You the Living*, is the consistent referral to Sweden's 'guilt' of its wartime collaboration with the Nazis – a national guilt born by a Swedish film-maker.

Dog Days is more explicit in its concentration on the soullessness of modern, mercantile planning and its de-humanising insistence on the prominence of retail space and vehicle access over the communal or social. The suburban Austrian home is depicted as meticulously manicured but hermetically sealed, the hot weather adding to the tendency of all houses to pull down their window and door shutters. The central character of a security salesman, forever cajoling via the potential threats of modern life, accentuates the prominence of enforced, constructed, willed isolation. The figure of Anna does so too. For most of the film she occupies two kinds of space: the car parks, intersections and verges of retail parks and their interconnecting arteries, and the insides of the cars in which she hitches rides. In one particular scene, perhaps over-extending the consumerist theme, spiritual life, consumer life and modern Austrian history are conflated into a single car ride: Anna talks to a woman who recalls her family heredity, as a member of the aristocracy before its abolition in 1918: 'Are you a princess?' asks Anna. 'No but I would have had

a position at court. As it is I get by'. The two women sing Catholic hymns as they drive. The camera cuts to a travelling shot from the window: of the illuminated superstores of a massive out-of-town retail park.

In the second sense, both films rely on a certain contradiction at the heart of cinematic form: that is, both dwell on the precise incidents of antagonism, conflict, or dislocation that narrative seeks to reconcile, or in other words, on those aspects of life that would be passed over and forgotten with the arrival of either recognisable change, resolution or restitution. The evocation of Lethe – the mythical river of oblivion – may be the signature for both films of the ultimate destination for each and every character, and yet it is inevitably the key fact of the cinema that it preserves such passing. Cinema is, as Jean-Louis Comolli wrote, revisiting Bazin, a matter of always treating the motifs of ruin (Margulies 2003: 17). But, rather than the ruins of a material world, it is the ruins or traces of conflict and contradiction – that which the logic of the dialectic, of story, or editing, or psychology, seeks to synthesise – that are recalled; suspended so that they cannot be forgotten. What these films aim to account for and to delineate is less the representation of a particular place, object, thing or event. Rather, they seek to preserve a trace of a deeper resistance to remembrance or reconciliation: the acts or gestures, as movements or fragments of experience, at the heart of human interaction. They do not, however, pay homage to the traditions of cause or embedded reason for such acts, nor do they seek to identify the results of such actions or moments; merely the means. It is again reminiscent of Jean-Luc Nancy's configuration of 'sense' as that always already recognisable slice of experience that simultaneously makes itself felt whilst it slips away from symbolisation or signification. In that way it points to a deeper aspect of 'sense', to a 'sense' of embodying the human and therefore, what must be endured – at least before it can be explained.

In a radio broadcast in 2003, reproduced in *Philosophical Chronicles* (2008), Nancy posed the question of the 'everyday', asking 'must we *rescue* the everyday?' (Nancy 2008a: 39). Nancy contrasted Heidegger's attempts to locate an 'authentic' history – a destinal identity of a people – with its 'inauthentic' corollary, the insignificance and matter-of-factness of the everyday that constitutes the 'preontological ground of the ontological experience, that is, of "existing" in the strong sense' (Nancy 2008a: 38). Heidegger was forced to describe this everydayness as a being-toward-death, devoid of the mythical destiny of the historical community of people; there was 'no truth of the everyday that was not itself everyday and therefore banal, mediocre, and vulgar'

(Nancy 2008a: 38). Any attempt to overcome this insignificance – whether aesthetic, historical, religious – inevitably leads to the contradiction of a hyper-significance, even where it does not go so far as becoming ritual or neurosis. The significant is, and always has been, traditionally located in the exception: the true, the good, the beautiful. It is that which stands out in distinction from the everyday. Nancy cites its philosophical lineage: ‘the Platonic Idea, Husserlian transcendence, Christian revelation’; ‘the thing should rise up and constitute an event, a coming-to-be’ (Nancy 2008a: 40). Its register, he says, is *appearing*. The everyday however, remains in its non-appearance. Each time something is brought forth it annuls or eclipses the everyday, the insignificant with significance. However, it is possible too for the everyday to maintain an obstinacy within the event – in the contradiction of its passing, since, says Nancy, ‘only then, after the fact, does it take place’ (Nancy 2008a: 41).

Here, crucially, Nancy finds a cinematic means for the inscription of the everyday, in Kiarostami’s film *And Life Goes On*. It is a point borrowed from his earlier examination of Kiarostami’s cinema, in which he argued that cinema is a gesture of movement between (a ‘sliding along’) of one fragment of presentation, or ‘patence’, and the next:

Where does it slide to indefinitely? In a certain way, toward insignificance (*insignifiance*) (there where the other arts appeal to an excess of *significance*). Toward the insignificance of life that offers itself these images, always in movement, going toward no mystery, no revelation, only this sliding along by means of which it leads itself from one image to another (Nancy 2001: 78).

The cinema, and here, the particular cinema that is *Dog Days* and *You the Living*, presents precisely the contradiction of the everyday and the exception: the violence of the everyday, isolated, brought forth and then passed over, to the next, and the next. They do not offer celebration or mourning, they do not seek to make singular any particular event or to determine any particular essence. It is a kind of affirmation, not of the image of change or reconciliation but the affirmation of the potential in carrying on. It is the question Nancy asks towards the end of his radio piece: ‘Empiricism and resignation, or a quiet resource for thinking otherwise?’ (Nancy 2008a: 43). What remains is a kind of faith, that which says (and here Nancy proclaims the same as Andersson’s barman) that ‘Tomorrow is another day’ (Nancy 2008a: 43).

The movement, or 'sliding along', from one moment to the next constantly replays the contradiction of appearance and disappearance that separates the significant and the insignificant. Each fragmentary sequence in *Dog Days* or *You the Living* delineates an instant for an instant without accommodating it into any idea or code of signification. Only with passing does each particular life or experience appear as a particular exception or moment of distinction before rejoining the passage of, in Nancy's words, 'the nonappearance of all other lives' (Nancy 2008: 44).

Passing is, in a sense, the core of Ulrich Seidl's second fiction film, *Import Export*. It is, in effect, the passing of lives through the fixed borders of place and the necessities of economy. It is not a literal, narrative passing – as an encounter. Rather the opposite, the passing that is continuous as an event without meetings or conclusions. It raises two lives out of the invisibility of the constant passage and returns them to the continuity of passing on. The film recounts the movements of two people across the Austrian-Ukrainian border. In one movement – East to West – a young nurse, Olga, leaves her family and young baby to move to Austria in search of higher wages. In the second movement – West to East – a young man, Paul, who owes money to debtors, accompanies his stepfather on a business trip delivering slot machines; his uncle, however, uses the economic disparity as a means to revel in hedonistic excess, drinking heavily and hiring prostitutes. Struggling financially, Olga takes a second job in the Ukraine as an on-line sex worker but fails to understand the demands of internet clients. In touch with a friend who has already travelled West, Olga resolves to go to Austria. There she works variously as an office cleaner and then as a housekeeper before being give a job as a cleaner in the geriatric ward of a modern hospital. Paul, likewise, takes a job as a shopping centre security guard in Vienna but is beaten and humiliated by a gang of youths. On the run from loan sharks, he joins his boorish stepfather. In the hospital, Olga's nursing skills go unrecognised by the hospital and resented by front line staff after Olga builds a caring relationship with an elderly patient, Erich, though later Erich dies. At the same time, Olga has to ward off the attentions of a bullying male nurse and a jealous female colleague. During a party given for the patients, the female colleague's jealousy leads to a fight with Olga. Travelling through Slovakia, Paul and his stepfather try to do business at a lawless ghetto that is home to a large Roma population but are chased away. In the Ukraine, Paul becomes increasingly frustrated and disillusioned with his stepfather's abuse of prostitutes he picks up in bars. Paul walks out on his stepfather in disgust, attempting but failing to find work at a local

market. Olga is last seen sitting in the staff restroom laughing with colleagues. Paul is seen walking a long country road hitching a ride.

Although *Import Export* is more prominently focused on the two lengthier sequences of Olga and Paul, rather than the dozen or so characters that populate *Dog Days*, its method is the same: the accumulation of fragmented instances of experience rather than a clearly related continuity of cause and effect. Paul is first seen at a security guard training exercise; next, in uniform, patrolling a shopping mall at night; then attacked and humiliated by the gang. Thereafter, he is a security guard no longer. The transitions between such instances are withheld; only their barest essentials gaze at each instance of experience. Likewise, Olga is hired and fired without reason from housekeeping jobs when first arriving in Austria, at least seemingly on the whim of householders. Each moment is a moment in passing of two people who appear in the place of what can only be imagined as countless others that remain hidden or unrecorded. The film's opening, pre-credit shot, is of an anonymous man outside a snow-covered apartment block repeatedly trying to start a moped. This figure does not appear again or play any other part in the film. He emerges from the background of the modern city simply as a single encounter between the city and Seidl's camera.

The film's final image, from which both Olga and Paul are absent, is a simple document of the geriatric hospital ward at night, only the beeping and the flicker of lights from the medical monitors that connect the human to the technological grid of modernity. This is accompanied by the single voice of a dementia patient repeating over and over the word 'death'. Such an image suggests the gloomiest prognosis for human finitude but such negativity is the key to the contradictory power of Seidl's film. In a further essay from the same series of radio broadcasts Nancy contemplates the function and value of negativity in a manner which cuts to the heart of the necessity of Seidl's film, something that should be born in mind when it is recalled that the modern hospital authorities demonstrated a fundamental distrust of images and a deep reluctance to allow filming to take place at all:

[...] on every side, we rail against nihilism, against negativism, against all forms of retreat, suspension, finitude, or impossibility, judged wrongly or rightly – and most often wrongly and confusedly – to be either morbid or suicidal. In their place, we ask for affirmation or value, decision and resolve, and from this perspective a symmetrical

haziness could suggest that one wishes at all cost to be positive, to use an expression that has been forged, by no means at random, by advertising (Nancy 2008a: 53).

It is precisely those intermittent images – from the banality of the intransigent motorcycle, to the profound sadness of the geriatric ward – that provide the film's collective insights into the real of material existence; those fragments shorn away from narrative arcs or psychological formulae. Some negative critics have decried the film for being intrusive – essentially for having the temerity to even enter such a hospital space (as in Wheatley 2008: 47). Yet Seidl's camera is anything but intrusive. His precise, dispassionate and meticulous framing, rather than intruding on the 'dignity' of the patients, records their condition in iconographic simplicity. It is the same meticulous compositional positioning – neither salaciously provocative nor furtively suspicious – by which Seidl documents the sequences in the extraordinary Roma community in Slovakia: a community that has been forced to take over an entire Soviet-era block, strewn with detritus since they are outside of the systems of social welfare. Seidl positions his camera with care and records the fragments of experience in the midst of the passage of his characters.

In the end, whatever may be said of *Dog Days*, *You the Living* or *Import Export*, they embody and importantly seek to demonstrate a basic endurance at the heart of the human, to the human being's resistance to its own grasp. None of them seeks to synthesise the events, characters, moments or sequences drawn from modern lives on the margins into anything so much as an absolute or a concept for overcoming the situations depicted or the finitude of human existence. Yet nor do they consign such finitude to nihilism. They describe only the passage of presentation and withdrawal of possible meanings into the evidence of exceptions, of moments of everyday made distinct, that they then return to the everyday of countless non-appearances and without the destinies of new beginnings. Whether transcendent or immanent, the formula for a human redemption cannot be located or merely given over to tradition or positivity. The obscurity of the closing image of the hospital ward in *Import Export* is contrasted with the horizon of the open road on which Paul has set out. In both *You the Living* and *Dog Days*, there is essentially a turning to the heavens: in the latter, as an acknowledgement of the rains; in the former, as a dream of destruction – but a dream nonetheless, since no shot actually connects the sequence of skyward glances with the bombers in any diegetic relation. The failure of each film to offer an image or an articulation of redemption or reconciliation is their necessary recourse to the contradiction of film

as the passage and exposure of sense and the human condition. It is, in a sense — and a non-religious sense — a confession of the human condition through the necessity of its exposure.

CONCLUSION

Interrupted Myth and Necessary Negativity

This thesis has argued that in the period following the collapse of Soviet Communism a number of films emerged, from Russia, Eastern and Western Europe and the United States, that interrupted and made problematic the symbolic, narrative and conceptual frameworks for the expression of, and relation between, violence and redemption. These films forcefully engage in a presentation of situations and events driven by violent and destructive conditions and the suffering that results, whilst denying any recourse to narrative reconciliation, interpretation, redemption or moral judgement according to traditions. Equally, they do not assert distinctly modernist modes of conceptual self-reflexivity or particular crises of the subject. Nor do they present the wider, overarching modernist aim of collapsing art into politics whereby the production of art is directed at redemption or an overcoming of the political or aesthetic. Furthermore, these films are united by their presentation of a picture of violence, aggression and destruction as a perverse social and psychological condition – something akin to a ‘fallen’ state or an aporetic of moral contradictions that philosophy since Kant has called, *in extremis*, a ‘radical evil’. In short, these films present humanity as always already disposed to conflict with its own best interests.

The films themselves, ranging from Kira Muratova’s *The Asthenic Syndrome* to Gus Van Sant’s *Elephant*, via the ‘documentary’ form of Artur Aristakisyan’s *Palms*, the ‘realist’ form of Béla Tarr’s *Sátántangó* and the studio artifice of Roy Andersson’s *Songs from the Second Floor*, represent a disparate selection not easily or obviously contained by traditional categorisation. They do not conform to particular generic paradigms such as ‘thriller’, ‘disaster movie’, ‘science fiction’, though some have such referential elements. They do not conform to formal or narrative structures such as classical narrative, psychological realism, or modernist self-reflexivity, though again, they draw on many such elements. Nor are they categorisable by national characteristics or a legacy belonging to a particular national cinema tradition; though here we might point to a particularly Western, or ‘Occidental’, orientation in the sense of their core relation to the characteristics of ‘fall’ and redemption.

However, it is this last characteristic, built around the equation of time (the ‘post-historical’ era) and place (the Western, ‘Christian’, tradition) that provides the thread that links these films together. Their preoccupation with the recognisable but incomplete, dislocated or insufficient symbols and myths associated with suffering, destruction, violence and redemption offers a guide. In particular, the movement identified by Paul Ricoeur, the movement from defilement through sin to guilt, provides a potent set of symbols that the films can be seen to disrupt. This disruption, or ‘interruption’, provides a term that ties the approach taken by these films to a parallel theoretical apparatus put forward by the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy; the interruption of symbols, myths and transcendent narratives as the very means to access an always already experiential ‘sense’ that, while not providing solutions to the disturbing conditions on show, nevertheless can affect the spectator with a profound discomfort, an anxiety or a touching concern. Such a denial of the formula for redemption does not imply an immediate collapse into meaninglessness or nihilistic self-destruction. Ricoeur’s assertion that the final stage of guilt is determined by the facility of ‘confession’ (‘in guilt I accuse myself’), is reconfigured as an opening onto ‘sense’ or an always already ‘real’ of the world in which we are all a part – film-maker, spectator, film – that constitutes a form of ‘confession’ through the passive apparatus of cinema. This cinema places, through its engagement in a deliberate and at times confrontational insistence on the act of showing, an imperative or demand upon the faculties of recognition and reflection. Such a demand is not so much impressed upon the spectator through a conceptual apparatus of specific signs or explicitly formalist, reflexive techniques as it is accumulated through selective fragments orientated by the act of ‘looking’ or ‘showing’, over and above an articulation or discourse through montage (‘telling’ or ‘emplotting’). In short, such cinema utilises what is central to the cinema as an audio-visual presentation, in advance of the conceptual formulae of narrative, to respond to situations that, themselves, defy the logic and presupposition of words.

These films utilise a form of ‘non-representational realism’ not grounded in a simple mimetic relation to an objective world, but reminiscent of a ‘real’ of the world proclaimed by Jean-Luc Nancy as ‘a reality indiscernibly and simultaneously empirical and transcendent, material and ideative, physical and spiritual’ (in James 2006: 240n.13); or a ‘real’ that is formed by the impossibility of identifying either pure concepts or pure phenomena, and is rather a world exposed through the excesses or suspensions that take place when either the taken-for-granted symbolic worlds or the experiential material worlds are exposed at their limits.

Jean-Luc Nancy's specific discourse on the cinema, in particular on the films of Abbas Kiarostami, has been criticised for not ultimately providing 'applicable concepts to build a new path for film studies' (Kretzschmar 2002). However, it is the argument of this thesis that the refusal to consign cinema to a semiotics of usable concepts and signs is precisely what makes Nancy's proposition useful and suggestive in respect of films that similarly refuse to conform to workable, identifiable systems of representation. Such an insistence on concepts and signs that transcend the specificity of content and form belies continued preoccupation with 'representation' and images *per se* and the breakdown of films into genres, types or units of meaning. Nancy's approach signals a recognition of the practice of cinema and its artefacts (films) as themselves fragments of a 'world' configured through the persistent fragmentation of experience. It provides the incentive not to categorise films through the instigation of one system or regime of signs after another but to realign cinema towards an engagement with the experiential world (of 'sense') through those elements or aspects that cinema 'enframes'. Such enframing is an act of selection and limitation, of highlighting and directing and stands in marked difference to the narrative space of a seamless world of motion, duration, narrative and meaning, or to the declaration of meaninglessness. An insistence upon the codes of representation is challenged by the Austrian director Ulrich Seidl when he states that the proper question in response to his films is not 'is this pessimistic or optimistic' (i.e. what does this mean; what conclusion has the film-maker drawn?) but 'what am I showing and why?' (i.e. look at this, why might it be necessary to show this?; what if this were not shown?) (Seidl 2008).

Stephen Mulhall, writing on the cinema, points to the Heideggarian inflection of the word 'enframing', which the German philosopher defined as a 'destructive grasp of nature as standing reserve'; that is, treating the world as material utilisable for technological, exploitable purposes (Mulhall 2002: 48). Mulhall relates the term to its cinematic sense in an artistic medium that is more dependent than any other on technological intervention. This presents a double-bind: the cinema suggests, and has been variously identified as the medium *par excellence* for recording the world without the mediation of human subjectivity. Such were the conclusions drawn by both Vertov and Bazin from opposing ends of the formal spectrum. At the same time, the cinema demands a clear responsibility on the part of the film-maker for the choices, whether configured to predetermined structures of meaning or not, involved in every shot and edit: to 'take responsibility for enframing the world' (Mulhall 2002: 49).

Regarding this Heideggarian terminology, Nancy's position uses the term 'care' (in relation to 'regard') as an orientation, on the part of the film-maker, of the cinematic act of looking. That is, he extends the principle of responsibility for enframing to an engagement with the presentation and withdrawal ('syncopation') of meaning under the conditions of filming as distinct from representing a narrative, dialectic or character-subjective stance using pre-determined formulae. In short, he withdraws any pre-determined sense of the world in favour of a 'sense' itself derived from an exposure to a particular set of conditions and fragments of experience: a sense that it is the world, rather than the world of images, that matters most. If cinema (or the cinema of Kiarostami, at least) is anything, claims Nancy, it is a 'transport' – a 'force or a motive that remains inexhaustible in its reasons and effects'; '[i]t is a transport authorizing itself: not a narrative delivering a genesis or a maturation, an unconcealment or a denouement, but at the most a chronicle of incidents in a journey that is truly neither of being nor of becoming' (Nancy 2001: 54). That is, rather than being a recuperation of being as the totality of the real (as implied by Bazin and Kracauer) or of becoming, a virtuality or potentiality accessible through the 'gaps' of montage (Deleuze) – either way suggestive of an 'essence' of the cinematic that transcends all particular films – the cinema is a continuous fragmentation and relativisation. The fragmentation itself becomes not so much a ground in itself (as in modernism), or a unity in and of itself and of a greater 'whole' (as in Romanticism) but a continuation and further fragmenting of the fragments. Each fragment is itself a remainder to each and every symbol, myth or traditional point of recognition whose signification has been exceeded.

The question of 'fragmentation' – of its history as an aesthetic strategy or form – remains as an underlying point of reference for the films described here; not least since concepts of fragmentation are central to the cinema *per se*. Godard and Benjamin (along with Vertov and Deleuze) conceive of the cinema's ability to break the visible world into fragments or to retrieve and redeem particular fragments retrospectively as the cinema's essential mode. Rancière tells us that the cinema is the material realisation of the Romantic definition of art as the 'union of conscious and unconscious processes' (Rancière 2004: 5) that itself emanated from the 'fragmentation' of the Kantian critical system and for which, at least according to the Jena Romantics, found its true form within the poetic fragment (in Critchley 1997: 88-89).

However, Nancy suggests in *The Sense of the World* that such an aesthetics of fragmentation – its declared autonomy in the modern sense having confirmed for itself an absoluteness that

cancels the relativity it was its purpose to confirm – requires an event of fragmentation in itself, ‘an endless dispersal of its occurrence’, as Jeffrey Librett writes, to make relative its strewn fragmentation’ (in Nancy 1997: xviii). Tied in with Nancy’s perspective on the cinema, it is a question of adapting and extending this perspective to a broader range of films than that from which he originates his claim, not, as has been said, to inaugurate a ‘new system of applicable concepts’ but to reflect a movement through and between films and themes that do not reduce either film or theme to a generic system of formal traits or a dialectic of signs. It is taken in the spirit put forward by Nancy at the close of *The Evidence of Film*:

Cinema is truly an art – in any case the technique – of a world that suspends myths. Even if it has put itself in the service of myths, at the limit, it finishes by taking them away, it carries off all epiphanies of meaning and of immobile presence into the evidence of movement. A world that links by going from one film to the next, and that learns thus, very slowly, another way of producing meaning (Nancy 2001: 78).

In the cases discussed above, this movement of dispersal is focused on violent and destructive events or conditions, and circulates around a hiatus in the directional configurations of redemption. The films confound any linear directionality that is future-oriented (the Christian narrative that is mirrored in so many secular narratives of overcoming, of the individual, the political or the technological) or retrospective (as in the Benjamin/Godard inflected restitution of past fragments as ‘dialectical images’). They also move beyond the ultimately unifying foundational totality of a ‘realist’ world to be glimpsed through the contingent fragments within fiction (Bazin, Kracauer, Wenders). In the end, what is fragmented is the arrangement of ends and beginnings in themselves. As each film has a linear timeframe, within it, the pressures of its own arrangement take on a certain aspect of the Romantic fragment. As Critchley remarks, the failure or naïveté of the Romantic expression of the fragment is that it is both complete and incomplete, whole and a part: ‘It is a form that embodies interruption within itself. That is to say, the fragment fails’ (Critchley 1997: 106).

Critchley, working from *The Literary Absolute*, an earlier text by Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, states, ‘the very form of an ensemble of fragments constitutes a field irreducible to unity’ (Critchley 1997: 108). This replaces the Romantic fragment that ‘is continually referred

back to the chaotic singularities that make it possible' (Critchley 1997: 108). Ultimately, Romanticism fails because, 'there is no such thing as romanticism, or a romantic work. All the fragments offer is a practice of writing – a speculative, critical, interrogative, limitless field or ensemble – that opens onto the promise of romanticism' (Critchley 1997: 112).

What I hope to have shown is that, in place of 'writing', the cinema is able to present itself as both the fragments and the fragmenting of the practice of looking at the world: assembling a 'speculative, critical, interrogative, limitless field' of visible and experiential evidence of events and conditions configured by violent and destructive forces, by the 'mystery' of such forces that therefore fragment the structures of redemption and the marks of their ends and beginnings.

Simon Critchley emphasises wit and irony as the key elements of the Romantic fragment: wit, in this context, is the sudden imparting of an idea, a moment or spark of ingenuity; irony, is the double-bind at the heart of human communication, the expression of the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of a complete communication (Critchley 1997: 112). In cinematic terms, wit is the 'enframing' of the remarkable image, the fleeting impression of an emotion, an experience (what Wenders would call the 'found' or 'profound' and Herzog, an 'ecstatic truth'); irony is the impossibility at the heart of cinema's dialectic of montage. Critchley adds, wit is synthetic 'the chemical mixing of disparate elements', irony is '*diaretic*', 'the separation or division of those elements' (Critchley 1997: 114). In a revealing phrase that cuts to the heart of the Romantic fragment and similarly its position in the development of Jean-Luc Nancy's thinking of 'sense', recalled as 'a reality indiscernibly and simultaneously empirical and transcendent, material and ideative, physical and spiritual', Critchley claims that the movement between wit and irony in the fragment contains a 'spectrality' of terms resistant, ultimately, to a final concept: 'The rhythm of the romantic fragment is an interminable oscillation devoted to the indissoluble conflict of the absolute and the relative' (Critchley 1997: 115).

What Nancy derives from such an 'oscillation' is the artwork, and the status of the 'non-representational real' of the cinema, as 'syncopation'. As noted in Chapter Two, Nancy develops syncopation from his reading of Kant and the interruption that takes place between poetry and speculative thought. We should recall here that this 'syncopation' is the inevitable occurrence within language of the interruption and suspension of absolute meaning by the process of style. Likewise, the cinematic process of suspense that contains and contends with the situations of violence and destruction leads to the same hiatus within the films: the giving of a sense before a

signification. Nancy continues this development through a reading of Hegel that again suspends the revelation of ‘truth’ or ‘spirit’ delivered by the synthesis of the dialectic, and configures the artwork as ‘simply the very act of presentation’ (James 2006: 212). In contrast to the Hegelian response to Romanticism, this suspension of the dialectic is neither the ruination nor the salvation of art, but the moment when presentation ‘exceeds’ presentation to become simply the sensuous or affective form of itself – what Nancy calls an ‘offering of offering’ (in James 2006: 213). Here, through the presentation of the artwork, or in the particular case of the cinema, through the presentation of a ‘look’ that opens onto ‘sense’, this offering becomes a confession, a giving up of a sense of suffering, violence, or injustice. However, the cinema’s mode of apparatus, its passive acceptance of the look and the incompleteness of the necessarily fragmented shot (part symbol, part excess of the symbolic), refuses the traditional subjectivity of confession but moves beyond the pure contingency of witnessing. The cinema, in terms that recall Nancy’s ‘transimmanence’, offers an integration of both senses of ‘vision’: the sensory and the ideative. Through suspension and excess, the ‘vision’ of speculative thought merges with that of sight, of looking. If this can be said to redeem the ‘real’ as a recognition of the world, as it is experienced, with its injustices and contradictions, then it points towards redemption. But, equally, as the hiatus of concept and teleology, it exposes redemption’s traditions and myths and exhausts them. It gives recognition to the impossibility of reifying redemption in representational terms.

What these films engage with, in their various interruptions and conflicts, repetitions and obscurities, and, most of all, their disruption of their own ends, is a pattern of experience that mirrors the tension of a present that has, in philosophical terms, exhausted ‘metaphysics’. However, within the linearity of cinema’s motions they ceaselessly struggle against the formulae for ‘ends’ that, as such, serve as an affirmation of a sense and a world in the here and now. Nancy writes: ‘[...]sense beyond all sense, sense in the absence of sense, the overflowing of sense as element of the world or *world as absolute excess of sense* – can be considered tragic, comical, sublime, and/or grotesque’ (Nancy 1993: 23). This takes on, in Nancy’s schema, the primary or underlying objective of art and literature:

putting on stage *the sense of sense*, figuring and agitating its masks, its explosions of light, its trajectories, in an intense dramatization the resource of which is the Occident itself as an

original obscuring of sense: an interruption of myth and sacrifice, which become what the Occident can henceforth only mime (this is what it says about itself) (Nancy 1993: 23).

He finishes with the following remarks that serve to summarise the films described above:

The curtain has fallen on the metaphysical scene, on metaphysics as scene of (re)presentation. But that which is *played* henceforth in other ways, and on a theatre of the world that, quite mistakenly, certain people take to be a screen of simulation, while others (at bottom, the same) take it to be a scenario of ‘disenchantment,’ that which is played in the formidable drifting and cracking of all the continents [...] is anew the sending of an affirmation of the absolute excess of sense. Again, to be sure, it is sublime and grotesque, atrocious and laughable, but it is also already and anew beyond these judgements, beyond these assignations of the sense of sense. Not that everything simply has to be accepted: but the resistance to the unacceptable itself ought to proceed from another sense, from the nude, denuded affirmation – all the more pointed and exigent – of the sense of the world as world (Nancy 1993: 24).

In responding to the contradictions, violence and suffering on display – along with the humour, irony, and the remarkable images these films also contain – this double-vision responds to negativity with the offering or confession of negativity. Their strategy encapsulates the cinema’s most basic orientation, but they resist the temptation to seek recovery, reconciliation or redemption. As a result they often meet with resistance, or the critical accusation of drowning in their own misery, despondency or hopelessness. In contrast, however, these films may also point to a necessary negativity that refuses the recovery of positivity or overcoming; that is, they refuse to transform or domesticate it, to absolve it or divide it between values and subjects – good or bad. Such a negativity is not a refusal of meaning or a descent into despair or nihilism but a ‘confession’ and a demand that is never given, but that simply continues to move in fragments from one form or expression to the next; from one film to the next.

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Principal Films:

The Asthenic Syndrome (Asteniceskij Sindrom)

(1990 USSR, 153 min, b/w & col.)

Dir. Kira Muratova

Sc. Kira Muratova, Sergei Popov, Alexander Tschernych

Ph. Vladimir Pankov

Ed. Valentina Olejnik

Dog Days (Hundstage)

(2001 Aus, 127 min, col.)

Dir. Ulrich Seidl

Sc. Ulrich Seidl

Ph. Wolfgang Thaler

Ed. Andrea Wagner

Elephant

(2003 US, 85 min, col.)

Dir. Gus Van Sant

Sc. Gus Van Sant

Ph. Harris Savides

Ed. Gus Van Sant

Flanders (Flandres)

(2006, Fr, 91 min, col.)

Dir. Bruno Dumont

Sc. Bruno Dumont

Ph. Yves Cape

Ed. Guy Lecorne

Import/Export

(2007 Aus, 135 min, col.)

Dir. Ulrich Seidl

Sc. Ulrich Seidl, Veronika Franz

Ph. Ed Lachman, Wolfgang Thaler

Ed. Christof Schertenleib

Palms (Ladoni)

(1993 Rus, 129 mins, b/w)

Dir/Sc/Ph/Ed. Artur Aristakisyan

Russian Ark (Russki Kovcheg/Venäläinen arkki)
(2002 Rus/Ger/Jap/Can/Fin/Den, 99 min, col.)
Dir. Alexander Sokurov
Sc. Anatoli Nikiforov, Alexander Sokurov
Ph. Tilman Büttner
Ed. Sergey Ivanov

Sátántangó (Satan's Tango)
(1994, Hun/Ger/Switz, (Pt 1) 300 min / (pt 2) 135 min, b/w)
Dir. Béla Tarr
Sc. László Krasznahorkai, Béla Tarr
Ph. Gábor Medvigy
Ed. Agnes Hranitzky

Songs from the Second Floor (Sånger från Andra Våningen)
(2000 Swe, 100 min, col.)
Dir. Roy Andersson
Sc. Roy Andersson
Ph. István Borbás, Jesper Klevenås

Werkmeister Harmonies (Werckmeister harmóniák)
(2000 Hun/Fr/Ger/It/Switz, 145 min, b/w)
Dir. Béla Tarr
Sc. László Krasznahorkai, Béla Tarr
Ph. Miklós Gurbán, Erwin Lanzensberger, Gábor Medvigy, Emil Novák, Rob Tregenza, Patrick de Ranter, Jörg Widmer
Ed. Agnes Hranitzky

You, the Living (Du Levande)
(2006, Swe/Ger/Fr/Den/Nor/Jap, 94 min, col.)
Dir. Roy Andersson
Sc. Roy Andersson
Ph. Gustav Danielsson
Ed. Anna Marta Waern

Other Films:

(in order of appearance in the text)

Damnation, Béla Tarr, Hungary, 1988
World of Glory, Roy Andersson, Sweden 1994
Gerry, Gus Van Sant, USA 2001
Last Days, Gus Van Sant, USA 2005
Histoire(s) du cinéma, Jean-Luc Godard, France 1989-98
Life and Nothing More, Abbas Kiarostami, Iran 1992
Distance, Hirokazu Kore-eda, Japan 2003
Still Life, Jia Zhang-ke, People's Republic of China 2006
Quatermass and the Pit, Roy Ward Baker, UK 1967
The Day After Tomorrow, Roland Emmerich, USA 2004
Cloverfield, Matt Reeves, US 2007
Funny Games, Michael Haneke, Austria 1997
The Explosion of a Motor Car, Cecil Hepworth, UK 1900
Kill Bill, Quentin Tarantino, US 2003
Battleship Potemkin, Sergei Eisenstein, USSR 1925
The General Line, Sergei Eisenstein, USSR 1929
Man With A Movie Camera, Dziga Vertov, USSR 1928
The Last Bolshevik, Chris Marker, France 1993
In Girum Imus Nocte Et Consumimur Igni, Guy Debord, France 1979
Tokyo-Ga, Wim Wenders, Germany 1983
Lessons of Darkness, Werner Herzog, Germany 1992
The Wild Blue Yonder, Werner Herzog, Germany 2005
Until the End of the World, Wim Wenders, Germany 1991
The State of Things, Wim Wenders, Germany 1982
Diary of a Country Priest, Robert Bresson, France 1950
Aguirre, Wrath of God, Werner Herzog, Germany 1972)
Fitzcarraldo, Werner Herzog, Germany 1982
La Soufrière, Werner Herzog, Germany 1976
Fata Morgana, Werner Herzog, Germany 1970

Late Spring, Yasuhiro Ozu, Japan 1950
Kaspar Hauser, Werner Herzog, Germany 1975
Heart of Glass, Werner Herzog, Germany 1976
Stroszek, Werner Herzog, Germany 1976
Even Dwarfs Started Small, Werner Herzog, Germany 1970
Bells from the Deep, Werner Herzog, Germany 1993
The Seventh Seal, Ingmar Bergman, Sweden 1957
Elephant, Alan Clarke, UK 1988
Bowling for Columbine, Michael Moore, USA 2002
United 93, Paul Greengrass, USA 2006
World Trade Center, Oliver Stone, USA 2006
Paranoid Park, Gus Van Sant, USA 2008
The Class, Ilmar Raag, Estonia 2007
Beau Travail, Claire Denis, France 1999
Apocalypse Now, Francis Coppola, USA 1979
Come and See, Elim Klimov, USSR 1984
The Thin Red Line, Terrence Malick, USA 1998
Redacted, Brian De Palma, USA 2008
Jarhead, Sam Mendes, USA 2005
J'accuse, Abel Gance, France 1919
Black Hawk Down, Ridley Scott, USA 2001
The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Rex Ingram, USA 1920
Saving Private Ryan, Steven Spielberg, USA 1998
Band of Brothers, various, USA 2001 (TV)
All Quiet on the Western Front, Lewis Milestone, USA 1930
Full Metal Jacket, Stanley Kubrick, UK 1987
Born on the Fourth of July, Oliver Stone, USA 1989
Battle for Haditha, Nick Broomfield, UK 2007
Apocalypse Now Redux, Francis Coppola, US 1979/2000
Ivan's Childhood, Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR 1962
Waltz With Bashir, Ari Folman, Israel 2008

2012, Roland Emmerich, US 2009

Mad Max trilogy, George Miller, Australia 1979-1985

The Postman, Kevin Costner, USA 1997

Animal Love, Ulrich Seidl, Austria 1996

Models, Ulrich Seidl, Austria 1998

Jesus You Know, Ulrich Seidl, Austria 2003